THE

SCOTCH PREACHER:

OR,

A Collection of SERMONS.

VOL. II.

THE

SCOTCH PREACHER:

OR

A Collection of SERMONS.

By ſome of the moſt eminent CLERGYMEN of the Church of SCOTLAND.

VOL. II.

EDINBURGH:

Printed for T. CADELL, London;

AND

J. DICKSON, Edinburgh.

MDCCLXXVI.

CONTENTS.

SER-

SER-

SER-

SERMON XIV.

SERMON XV.

SERMON XVI.

SERMON XVII.

SERMON I.

The tendency of the Conſtitution of the Church of Scotland to form the temper, ſpirit, and character, of her Miniſters.

By ALEXANDER CARLYLE, D. D.

Preached at the opening of the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale, May 5. 1767.

PSAL. xlviii. 12. 13.

Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, conſider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following.

IT is an important queſtion, What effect moral cauſes have in forming the characters of men? ſince on that depend the utility and excellence of laws and inſtitutions. For if natural cauſes ſolely, or chiefly, operate on the human mind; if men are formed like plants, by the heat of the ſun, and the fertility of the ſoil; the labours of the ſage and and the legiſlator are in vain: but if, on the other hand, they can be moulded by diſcipline and laws, and may attain to dignity and virtue by the force of wiſe inſtitutions, the beſt ſervice that can poſſiby be done them, is to bring them under the power of good government, or to

preſerve it among them when already eſtabliſhed.

It is with a view to this queſtion, that I propoſe, in this diſcourſe, to conſider the conſtitution of the church of Scotland; not as it is founded in the word of God, or as it is agreeable to the plan of the primitive times; more important propoſitions ſtill, which have often received as much illuſtration, and been confirmed with as much proof, as the nature of the thing would admit; but only in certain points, as it is connected with ſociety, and as its external laws and regulations, that are of human invention, have a tendency to form the temper, character, and ſpirit of its members. The goodneſs of its inſtitutions, in this reſpect, I ſhall beg leave to conſider as the *towers, bulwarks, and palaces of our* Zion, which help at once to protect and adorn her; which will recommend her to the love and reverence of all her ſons; and prove, by one argument more, that, even in her outward fabric, ſhe is not unworthy of that *wiſdom which cometh from above.*

My Reverend Fathers and Brethren, I hope, will forgive me, for attempting a ſubject, which I humbly apprehend becomes me better, than if I held up a model for their behaviour as miniſters of Chriſt; which has often been done by maſterly hands, on ſuch occaſions. I am ſure they will hear me with candour on points with reſpect to which I may be ſo liable to miſtake; and on which I ſhall, nevertheleſs,

ſpeak

ſpeak with freedom, prompted by the love of my own order, and veneration for this church.

In diſcourſing of this ſubject to an audience of another kind, I ſhould firſt delineate the conſtitution of this church, as conſiſting of different orders, formed into ſubordinate judicatories, with all the powers of government ſo equally and properly divided, as to make a republic of no imperfect kind. But this is ſo well underſtood by my Reverend hearers, that it would be impertinent in me to conſume their time upon it.

It ſhall therefore be the chief object of this diſcourſe, to ſhew the tendency of the conſtitution of the church of Scotland to form the temper, ſpirit, and character of her members. And this, by the bleſſing of God, I ſhall endeavour to point out in three material inſtances, that reſpect them as miniſters, as Britons, and as men. For I will ſhew, in the

1*ſt* place, The tendency of our eccleſiaſtical conſtitution, to preſerve good morals, and purity of doctrine.

2*dly*, Its tendency to inſpire us with the love of liberty, and the free government of our country.

3*dly*, Its tendency to form the perſonal character of its members.

I. I AM, *firſt*, To ſhew the tendency of our eccleſiaſtical conſtitution to preſerve good morals, and purity of doctrine.

The apoſtle Paul, ſpeaking of the miniſters

of the goſpel, requires it as their firſt quality, that they be blameleſs, or irreproachable, 1 Tim. iii. 2.; for this reaſon, no doubt, leſt the people, to defend themſelves from their rebukes or cenſures, ſhould ſay, *Phyſician, heal thyſelf!* a reproach, that, whenever it falls with juſtice, takes from them all liberty of ſpeech, and obliges them to tolerate vice, and to fear the vicious. For though their character and miſſion is independent of the merit of their lives, yet the bulk of mankind are neither refined nor equitable enough to make this diſtinction; but when they deſpiſe a man's private actions, they will deſpiſe his public miniſtrations too.

In other churches, the pomp and ſplendor of worſhip, the power and dignity of the ſuperior clergy, and their temporal wealth and dominion, will preſerve influence and reſpect to their order, even after corruption of manners has crept in among them. But the members of this church, without dignities, without power, without wealth and dominion, hold their aſcendant over the minds of men, only by their virtue and abilities.

And happy is it for us, that, being men of like frailty with others, we are laid under the reſtraint of diſcipline: A diſcipline by the laws of the realm ſtill veſted in this church, by which ſhe can not only exclude from her higheſt privileges ſuch of her lay-members as lead vicious and diſorderly lives, but entirely expel ſuch corrupt eccleſiaſtics as bring diſgrace upon their order; a diſcipline that, though ſtrict in

its

its own nature, yet is mild and gentle in its execution; for the cenſorial power is committed to the moſt ſubordinate court that has juriſdiction over the clergy; its inſpection is near, its vigilance perpetual; and, by giving check to the firſt appearance of faults, it prevents their growing into crimes.

By the nature of our conſtitution, there is little danger that the Church ſhould become remiſs in the exerciſe of her diſcipline: for ſhe depends on that, in a great meaſure, for the eſteem ſhe has in the world, and for her influence over the people, to whom the laſt appeal is made in the trials of a candidate for the miniſtry; for they are at liberty to object to his morals or his doctrine; ſo that the virtue and credit of her members are deeply intereſted in the execution of it. Her diſcipline is ſtill further ſecured by this means, that as there is a perfect equality among all thoſe in whom the cenſorial power is veſted, the connection of protection and dependence, which has a tendency to ſcreen faults, and to flatter vices, cannot take place; but, on the contrary, the jealouſy and rivalſhip of a republican ſpirit, will never fail to favour the ſtrict execution of the laws.

What I have ſaid with reſpect to the morals of the clery, extends alſo to the duties of the paſtoral office, the diligent execution whereof is committed to the ſame watchful care. It likewiſe applies to doctrine, the purity of which it is neceſſary to ſecure. For as the minds of

men are not formed to think exactly in the ſame manner on all points, and as the love of ſingularity, or diſtinction, might carry them far, were they a liberty to give vent to their peculiar opinions, it is a wiſe reſtraint, that confines our public teachings within certain limits preſcribed by the church. Hard as this may ſeem to bear on liberty of conſcience, there cannot be a national church without it; for if full freedom was allowed to the extravagant fancies of men, they would ſoon divide, and branch out into a thouſand different ſects. It is neceſſary too, that the magiſtrate, who is to protect the public religion, ſhould know what it is, and have it clearly defined.

But it may, perhaps, be objected to what I have ſaid on this point, that the fact is againſt me; and that our diſcipline, which I have repreſented to be of ſo much utility, and of ſo much force, has, in reality, loſt its effect. This I cannot think clear, by any means: for it is much more probable, that the complaints on this head ſhould take their riſe from that peeviſh humour, which, in every age, leads men to depreciate the worth and virtue of the preſent times, when compared to the former; or to a ſpirit of faction, to an alteration of manners, or to ſome other leſs obvious ſource; than that our conſtitution of government, without any viſible cauſe, ſhould have loſt its vigour, or the principles I have mentioned no longer operate on the human mind.

But, my Reverend Fathers and Brethren, let

us

us look round us into the world, and we ſhall do ourſelves the juſtice that the reſt of mankind are willing to do us; for, in this reſpect, there are no eccleſiaſtics that ſtand higher in the general eſteem, than the clergy of the church of Scotland. And, in fact, after all the complaints that have been made of degeneracy, and corruption of morals, of what crimes have they been guilty? Of what kind, and of what number have they been convicted? What order of men can boaſt of ſo many members whoſe characters are unſullied even with the imputation of crimes? They are not angels, but men: they cannot boaſt of perfect innocence and virtue; they do not pretend to an exemption from the infirmities of human nature; and if, now and then, a man *of like paſſions with others*, has yielded to the force of temptation, and ſuffered the juſt puniſhment preſcribed by the laws of the church, is not this a ſtronger proof of the goodneſs of our diſcipline, than of the licentiouſneſs of our morals?

If ſome guilty perſons have eſcaped, is that to be imputed to the corruption of our courts, rather than to the imperfection of all human tribunals? Are not the eſſential forms of trial to be obſerved, without which the innocent could not be ſafe? For what crime has any perſon been tried and acquitted of late, before our judicatories, of ſo deep a dye, as it would be for a member of our ſupreme court, in his capacity of a judge or juryman, to decide in a

particular

particular caſe, upon impreſſions of character received out of doors, or on his own general ideas of expediency and public good?

Nor can I readily admit, that our diſcipline has of late grown more remiſs, or that the morals of the clergy are now leſs pure, than in earlier periods of this church. For without laying any ſtreſs on the general obſervation, that great crimes are leaſt frequent in periods of refinement, when mens minds are ſoftened by the progreſs of knowledge and the arts, and brought under habitual reſtraint by the ſtability of legal government; I apprehend, that the complaints on this head may be, in a great meaſure, accounted for, by attending to a plain diſtinction between manners and morals.

Ignorance and ſuperſtition, from age to age, have fixed on things quite indifferent in their own nature, and, by ſtamping on them the characters of vice and virtue, have rendered it extremely eaſy for the artful and deſigning to impoſe upon mankind, and raiſe a character of ſanctity, at the ſmall expence of being rigid and exact in trifles, that have no connection with religion or morality; like the Phariſees of old, who paid *tithes of mint, aniſe, and cummin, but neglected the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy, and faith.* But the increaſe of knowledge, and the progreſs of ſociety, have reſtored many of theſe artificial virtues and vices to their own claſs again; and while religion and virtue have, in reality, gained by this alteration of manners, the ignorant and ſuperſti-

tious,

tious, (for there are ſome in all ages), continue ſtill to think them of the ſame importance as before, and judge of characters by the falſe ſtandard of former times.

What then is called manners, in general, or even the decorum of a particular character, are not properly the objects of laws and diſcipline. No rules can be preſcribed for modes that are changing every day, no ſtandard can be fixed for what is ſhifting continually; but every perſon muſt be left to the corrections of ridicule and contempt from the world, which are always applied to ſingularity, affectation, and indecency. Yet, even in this reſpect, the miniſters of this church are aided by her inſtitutions: for this ſpecies of faults, though not ſubjects of law, are liable to the private admonitions, and fraternal rebukes, of the cenſorial power.

So far then as laws and regulations, and the reſtraints of diſcipline, conduce to make men virtuous, or to keep them ſo, the conſtitution of the church of Scotland has been wiſely framed.

II. I PROCEED, in the *ſecond* place, To ſhew its tendency to inſpire us with the love of liberty, and the free government of our country.

Beſides the ſentiments natural to a Briton born ſince liberty was eſtabliſhed by law; beſides the liberal education of clergymen, and their early acquaintance with thoſe books of antiquity that inſpire mankind with elevated thoughts,

thoughts, and the love of freedom which reigned in the ſtate of ſociety they deſcribe; there are circumſtances peculiar to this church, which muſt endear the free conſtitution of their country more to her members than to other men.

When the reformation was firſt attempted in Scotland, under that form which is now eſtabliſhed, and which had the inclinations of the people in every age; it was not only for the rights of conſcience that our forefathers ſtruggled and fought, but for the rights of men; they made war not only on prieſts, but on tyrants; and when they conquered, they eſtabliſhed civil liberty, as the only guardian of true religion. The hard contentions of the times had, of themſelves, a tendency to rouſe and enlarge the mind; and being engaged againſt the ſame enemies, and involved in one common cauſe with the patriots, in every period of our hiſtory, the Preſbyterians appeared ſtrenuous aſſertors of the liberties of mankind, and of their country. On the other hand, during all the efforts of illegal power, our church, as one of the moſt determined and formidable foes of tyranny and tyrants, was ſure to feel the firſt effects of their wrath; at leaſt, examples of lenity were ſo rare, that ſhe was not deceived into the falſe confidence that ſuch flattering ſuſpenſions of hoſtility were deſigned to produce.

And not only are the members of this church excited to the love of liberty, by their attachment to their friends, and their averſion to

their

their enemies; but our very mode of government, and its genius and ſpirit, muſt form the mind to liberty, independent of the connection of intereſts, or our attachment to the Illuſtrious Family on the throne, and our gratitude for the many bleſſings we have derived from them: for equality, which is the foundation of freedom, is the foundation of our eccleſiaſtical conſtitution too; and the ſpirit of democracy is ſo entirely preſerved in all its inſtitutions, laws, and forms, that none of her members can poſſibly be ſubjects of any other than a free ſtate.

But this is a quality that our church has always been owned to poſſeſs; and to ſuch a degree, that her enemies have endeavoured to repreſent it as one of the worſt of her faults. For it was long objected to the Preſbyterians, that they were of ſuch a turbulent and ſeditious ſpirit, ſo violent and factious, as to be incapable of rule, and particularly incompatible with monarchical government, ſuch as that of Britain has ever been. But on ſtrict inquiry, this very complaint will be found to conduce to their praiſe: For in what times were they turbulent and ſeditious? Only in the times of tyranny; when to ſubmit, was to degrade human nature; when to be peaceable, was to be a ſlave. But, under the government of laws, with a race of kings on the throne who have aſſerted and enlarged, not encroached on the rights of mankind, no church in the world has been more obedient, or more loyal. Witneſs her

conduct in every period of danger to the ſtate; witneſs her unſhaken attachment, her active zeal, in the rebellions that have of late torn the bowels of our country.

Before the principles of toleration, that do ſo much honour to the laſt age, were eſtabliſhed, the church of Scotland was, no doubt, often ſeized with a ſpirit of violence againſt other denominations of Chriſtians, that, had ſhe been ſingular in that reſpect, would have juſtly rendered her an object of averſion. But this was far from being the caſe: ſhe was not, in this point, more ignorant, or more ſevere, than her neighbour-churches; and having often felt the heavieſt hand of perſecution, it was no wonder that ſhe was ſometimes violent and unrelenting in her turn. But for half a century paſt, ſince the minds of men have become calm and ſteady under a legal government, and ſince the ardent zeal of enthuſiaſm has given place to, or been tempered by, the benign principle of Chriſtian charity, the church of Scotland has demonſtrated the truth of that poſition of a great author, "That uniformity "is an idea of weak and vulgar minds:" for in ſubmiſſion to the laws, in loyalty to the crown, and in liberal and generous ſentiments to thoſe who differ from her, ſhe is outdone by no church in the world.

In this view, the church of Scotland may be conſidered as of great utility to the public; for without power or temporality to make her dangerous, ſhe breeds a ſet of men with principles

of freedom, who, acting in a body, and having an aſcendant over the minds of the people, muſt, while unſeduced, and uncorrupted, be one of the bulwarks of the ſtate. Before the happy æra of the union, the commons of Scotland, led by attachment to their chiefs, or prompted by religious zeal, appeared often indeed in the field on the ſide of liberty; but it was a liberty they neither enjoyed nor underſtood. And on account of certain untoward circumſtances that relate to the baſis of government in this country, the diſtinct ſenſe and knowledge of civil and political liberty, has not diffuſed itſelf ſo far among them as might have been expected. But the clergy of this church, fully ſenſible of the bleſſings we enjoy, and well inſtructed in the nature of government, in ſome degree compenſate for this defect; for they fill up the middle rank between the commons and their ſuperiors, and, in their intercourſe with the people, fail not to impreſs them with juſt ideas of the rights of men and of Britons, and to inſpire them with that love of the public which binds them to their country. While they retain their character for piety and good morals, they will not abuſe this influence over the people: when they depart from it, and become vicious and corrupt, they will no longer be believed.

III. But I proceed, in the *third* place, To point out the tendency of our eccleſiaſtical con-

ſtitution to form the perſonal characters of its members.

It is thought, that all men receive a certain caſt, or turn of character, from their profeſſion, and manner of life; and, ſo far as this influence extends, it is of importance what direction it takes. It muſt be owned, that there are ſome general prepoſſeſſions againſt the clerical profeſſion, as unfavourable to certain amiable and manly qualities, and as giving ſo deep a tincture to the very virtues that belong to it, that the piety of churchmen is believed to border on hypocriſy, their morals on auſterity, their learning on pedantry, and their zeal for religion and the good of mankind to be, for the moſt part, aſſumed as a pretence to aid or to cover their pride and ambition. But I am of opinion, that the tendency of the conſtitution of our church, not only obviates theſe general objections, but alſo that it has force enough to form a very reſpectable character; and, in particular, that admitting ſome few peculiar diſadvantages to which her miniſters are liable, there are not, on the whole, many orders of men, and no clergymen of any denomination, whoſe functions and manner of life are better ſuited than theirs to produce a ſpirit of independency, or to exerciſe and ſtrengthen ſome of the beſt faculties and affections of the mind.

If it be true, that it belongs to the *righteous*, and the free, to be *bold as a lion*, the miniſter of this church muſt derive fortitude and elevation

tion of mind from the cauſes already mentioned. His very manner of obtaining a living, never by purchaſe, ſeldom by perſonal application; the conſciouſneſs of being well qualified for the office, after having had his abilities and morals ſeverely tried; together with that equality of rank with the fathers of the church, to which he is at once admitted; tend, in the beginning, to inſpire him with manly and generous ſentiments: and the natural effect of the paſtoral employment, in which he is afterwards engaged, is to raiſe, and not depreſs the ſpirit. He has made choice of a profeſſion, which, though not opulent, is liberal; he has entered into a ſtate, which, though not improveable, is independent. Without the habits that contract the heart, without the views that enſlave the mind, the member of this church therefore reſts his hopes, in this world, on perſonal diſtinctions alone; on his talents, his learning, or his virtue.

In other churches, the great power and wealth of dignified clergymen, no doubt, throw a ſplendor on the whole body, and may often be ſtrong incentives to a noble and manly ambition: but as they leave the bulk of the order at ſo great a diſtance, and make preferment a conſtant object of attention, it may be queſtioned, how far they are favourable to ſome of the beſt qualities of the mind. In our church, equality of rank, whatever inconveniencies may otherwiſe attend it, effectually prevents the growth of ſome kind of vices; for every one of

her ſons ſtanding on the ſame ground with another, looks neither down with faſtidiouſneſs, nor up with adulation.

The part, beſides, that every clergyman of this church engages in, whenever he is ordained, not only to teach, but to rule, muſt ſtrengthen and invigorate the mind. For though the objects may appear but ſmall in compariſon with the great affairs of civil government; yet the ſame talents are exerted, the ſame affections and paſſions are exerciſed, the ſame powers and energies of mind are employed, in church-courts, as in others. And in the freedom of debate, in the buſtle of popular aſſemblies, in all applications to men, force and ſpirit are improved more than in any other exerciſe; and the faculties of the ſoul are not only whetted, but enlarged. It is more than probable, that our ſituation will ever prevent us from excelling in elegance of behaviour, in poliſhed manners, or in graceful accompliſhments; nor is it of much importance that we ſhould. But if we do not attain thoſe better qualities, that enable a man to act a vigorous and independent part, whenever his own opinions and affections, or the public good, ſhall engage him, we are without excuſe; for no churchmen were ever placed in a ſituation of more advantage for acquiring them. We ſtand at preſent, as I apprehend, diſtinguiſhed, as a body of men, for ſome of the qualities I have mentioned. Piety, good morals, and fidelity in his office, are indiſpenſable in a miniſter; but without a free and

independent

independent mind, he will want one of the beſt and moſt effectual guards to his virtues.

An eminent author has aſcribed certain peculiar vices to the clergy, which, he ſays, are derived from their profeſſion, and manner of life, in ſo much as to juſtify, in a great degree, the trite maxim, That "prieſts of all religions "are the ſame," and tend naturally to deſtroy the candour and ingenuity of their tempers, to render their probity for the moſt part ſuſpicious, and to make them dangerous to civil government. Now as theſe reflections coincide but too much with the prepoſſeſſions of many, and as religion itſelf may ſuffer by ſuch imputations upon her miniſters, it will not be improper to ſhew, that this charge does not apply to the members of this church, and that our conſtitution itſelf obviates theſe general objections.

The characteriſtical vices of clergymen that he chiefly dwells upon, are hypocriſy, ambition, and pride. "To hypocriſy," he alledges, "they are inclined; becauſe, being drawn from "the common maſs of mankind, they will ei"ther have no great turn for devotion; or, "were they ever ſo good, to ſupport the cha"racter of their profeſſion, and to impoſe up"on mankind, they muſt appear to be ſtill "better than they are." But our church is ſo happily conſtituted, that this objection does not apply to her members.

For admitting that the reſtraints of diſcipline might give check to the natural character,

were they to operate alone; yet, when they are counteracted by the principles of freedom, and the ſpirit of independency, which I have ſhewn to belong in a remarkable manner to the miniſters of this church, they cannot poſſibly overpower the candour and ingenuity of the mind. Our republican form of government, which expoſes every man's character and conduct to be nearly inſpected by his equals; our contentions in church-courts, where our talents and paſſions are ſufficiently employed; prevent both the inclination and the power of impoſing a feigned character on the public. Our early and conſtant intercourſe with the world, our daily communications with our people, the ſimplicity of our worſhip, and, perhaps, even the ſlight diſtinction of dreſs between us and other men, are all circumſtances that diſqualify us for acting the part of impoſtors.

Nor is this all: For if artifice and diſguiſe were attempted, they would now meet with but a cold reception. Superſtition and monachiſm having been long baniſhed from Proteſtant churches, the character of a clergyman that is moſt beloved and reſpected amongſt us, is that which is moſt amiable and reſpectable. The arts of popularity may, no doubt, ſometimes be tried, and particular prejudices and weakneſſes of the people may be applied to: but theſe arts cannot long be ſucceſsful. The other parts of a man's conduct that are inconſiſtent with his arts and his pretences, being expoſed to the near

inſpection

inſpection of familiarity, and the vigilance of rivalſhip, will ſoon betray or detect his real character. Popular virtues only, can always retain the love and eſteem of the people. An unfeigned piety, a tender humanity, diligence in the paſtoral office, integrity and candour, liberality of mind, ſteadineſs of conduct, uniformity of zeal; theſe are the qualities that render a man a popular and reſpectable miniſter of this church. And theſe, I hope, we do not in general need to feign, to pleaſe our people, or impoſe upon mankind.

With as little force can the charge of ambition, in the ſenſe he means, be brought againſt the miniſters of this church.

He alledges, "That, while the ambition of "other men is commonly ſatisfied by excelling "in their particular profeſſion, and thereby "promoting the intereſts of ſociety, the ambi-"tion of the clergy can only be ſatisfied by "promoting ignorance and ſuperſtition, and "implicit faith, and pious frauds: and having "got, what Archimedes only wanted, (viz. an-"other world on which to fix his engines), no "wonder they move this world at their plea-"ſure; which being added to the cloſe union "of intereſts that takes place among clergy-"men of the ſame religion, makes them ex-"tremely formidable to ſociety."

How much ſoever ſuch objections may apply to the prieſts of the church of Rome, whoſe hearts are hardened, by celibacy, to the intereſts of ſociety, there is no Proteſtant church againſt whom

whom they can juſtly be laid. And with reſpect to the church of Scotland, nothing can be more foreign to her conſtitution, or to the ſpirit and practice of her members. For, to cure the jealouſy of the ſtate, ſhe has admitted to a parity of rule with her miniſters, the order of lay-elders, who are incorporated in all her judicatories in ſuch numbers, as to be effectual guardians of the intereſts of ſociety, againſt every poſſible combination of the clergy. And as I have already obſerved, that we could not impoſe on the people, were we ever ſo much inclined to it; I muſt add, that every clergyman, being a member of the great community of Britain, which involves in it the intereſts of religion and liberty, as well as of our particular church, the private corporation-ſpirit is thereby counteracted and controlled, ſo that it can never be dangerous to ſociety. And to this great public we are bound, not by our principles alone, but by one of the ſtrongeſt affections of the human mind, the love of our families and children.

If the charge of pride and obſtinacy, when laid againſt the members of this church, is not already fully anſwered by what has been ſaid concerning the two preceding objections, let it be farther obſerved, that mens minds are wonderfully ſoftened ſince toleration was eſtabliſhed; for ſectaries having no longer the power of hurting each other, their animoſities are in a great meaſure at an end. And let me add, that our church in particular, guards againſt theſe

vices,

vices, by the equal power of its members, as rulers in a free and independent community, where pretence and authority have no effect, and nothing but reaſon and ſuperior powers of perſuaſion can prevail.

THUS have I endeavoured to ſhew the tendency of our eccleſiaſtical conſtitution to form the temper, ſpirit, and character of its members: or, in other words, I have *marked the towers, bulwarks, and palaces of our Zion*; which though not ſumptuous and coſtly edifices, yet are founded deep, and are well calculated for ſtrength and duration. But they are not perfect: ſo far as they are human, like all things elſe, they are liable to defects; a few of which I beg leave to point out, before I conclude, that we may ſkilfully bend our endeavours to ſupport our Jeruſalem where ſhe is weak, and to repair her where ſhe has fallen into decay.

The *firſt* defect I ſhall mention, is in the very fabric of our conſtitution itſelf; which intruſts the ſame body with the higheſt judicative and executive powers, and even with great part of the legiſlative too: A combination that, in ſome caſes, would be extremely dangerous; and, even in our caſe, is attended with this inconvenience, that our courts, in their judicative capacity, may ſometimes decide on general expediency, rather than particular laws; and with the temper of judges, leſs than the ſpirit of legiſlators. Hence it is, that partiality and injuſtice may be exerciſed, the innocent may be condemned,

condemned, and the guilty may be acquitted. One compenſation or balance, however, there is to this defect in our conſtitution; which is this, that the ſupreme power is not lodged in a permanent body, but in a court of repreſentatives choſen every year; and who being themſelves the peers of all thoſe who are tried before them, are not likely to be either able, or willing, to perſiſt in any plan of oppreſſion or injuſtice.

A *ſecond* defect is a certain conſequence of our republican conſtitution, which makes us liable to faction and party-ſpirit:

An evil no doubt fraught with many breaches of charity, and with much alienation of mens mind from each other. For men who ſet out with the firm belief that they are promoting public good, and ſerving the great ends of virtue and religion, and who are countenanced and confirmed by their aſſociates in this opinion, are apt, when acting in a party, to go lengths, of which, in other ſituations, they would be utterly aſhamed. Hence the liberty that is taken of making truth and conſcience to be only of one ſide; of branding each other with the names of libertine, and hypocrite; of magnifying an indecorum into a crime, or of conſtruing a ſevere or moroſe demeanour to be vile grimace; while the enemies of our church lie in wait for ſuch fair opportunities of ſeducing the credulous from every ſide, and the foes of all religion ſit *in the ſcorner's chair and laugh*.

This evil, which calls for the attention of all men

men of worth and virtue to mitigate and aſſuage its more violent ſymptoms, is however the genuine product of our conſtitution; and as long as we are free and independent, and, at the ſame time, imperfect creatures, can never be wholly cured. But it is happily controlled in its moſt pernicious effects, by the broad baſis of our ſupreme court, which brings members from every corner, uninfected with each others local paſſions; and by the inſtitution of elders: an order not only moſt wiſely calculated to promote religion and good morals among the people, and reconcile them to the diſcipline of the church; but alſo to unite us more cloſely with the commonwealth, to prevent the jealouſy of government, to guard againſt the encroachments of eccleſiaſtical power, and to abate the ferment of minds ſometimes overheated with party zeal and ſtrife.

The *third* and *laſt* defect that I ſhall mention, is the incompetent proviſion for the clergy: a defect that I do not unjuſtly aſcribe to the conſtitution; which was formed on a ſurrender of the patrimony of the church, and all temporal power and dominion, with entire reliance for its ſupport on the ſenſe which the public ſhould have of its utility. This is an evil not only ſeverely felt by the miniſters of this eſtabliſhment, (who, I am bold to ſay, would not diſhonour any ſociety upon earth), but of the moſt threatening aſpect on the church; ſince it may ſoon fill her with perſons of inferior birth and mean education, to the ruin of learning, and

religion

religion too: an evil, however, that we cannot juſtly impute, in all its extent, to the illiberal ſpirit of the generations that are paſt; ſince they could not poſſibly foreſee the rapid progreſs of commerce; otherwiſe, it is probable, they would have fixed on ſuch a kind of proviſion for the clergy, as would have riſen in ſome proportion to the proſperity of the country, and not fallen in its value every day.

What we may hope for from this ſplendid age, ſo fertile in grand and magnificent projects, is beyond my conjecture. But if the church of Scotland is ſuch as I have repreſented her to be, of ſo much utility, and of ſo little danger to the public, her falling ſtate, in this reſpect, will one day become an object to legiſlature itſelf: and men capable of great and extenſive views, will ſee, that, by preſerving our church in her vigour, they will execute a work truly worthy of themſelves; they will ſtrengthen one pillar of religion and liberty that is in danger of decay, and help to prolong the period of light and happineſs to mankind.

But, my Reverend Fathers and Brethren, though this defect in our conſtitution is a ſubject of anxiety and regret, and of uneaſy forebodings, we need not yet fall into deſpair. There are ſome conſiderations that ſerve, for the preſent, to extenuate this evil, and from which we may derive a temporary comfort.

May we not hope for a partial, at leaſt, and gradual redreſs of this evil, from the wiſdom and attention of our own ſupreme court of

law, ſo far as our ſituation is intruſted to their care? Have not many miniſters of this church already experienced, what juſt ſentiments that learned and venerable body entertain of the narrow allowance made for them, when compared with the flouriſhing ſtate of this country? Though the proviſion for the clergy has fallen very much in its value: yet is not their rank, in ſome reſpect, raiſed; not only by the removal of certain political prejudices, which ſeparated them from many of ſuperior order; but alſo by the riſe of all orders of men beneath them, through the improvements of induſtry, and the increaſe of wealth? What advantage may not be gained, from the clergy's having become the chief depoſitaries of general learning, now that the attention and efforts of almoſt all other men are devoted to commerce alone? Do not our univerſities borrow many of their faireſt ornaments from the church? And what glory may not be won in that field of diſtinction ſo lately opened to the learned of this country, I mean compoſition, and the art of writing; where the whole range of ſcience is before them, where there are laurels enough to ſatisfy the moſt ardent ambition of literary fame? It is here, ye riſing hopes of our Jeruſalem! my younger friends, who are ſtill candidates for the miniſtry, who have forſaken all to follow this ungainful profeſſion; it is here that you muſt look for your rewards in this world. Here you will find objects ſuited to your taſtes; here you will perceive a ſhining

path to reputation, that will anſwer the deſire of your hearts: for admiration is the paſſion of young and generous minds; and the love of diſtinction is predominant with the youth of genius, far above the love of wealth. It were indeed happy, if, by our regulations, and our own conduct, we could make it a mark of diſtinction to be admitted of our order.

It might now be expected that I ſhould addreſs myſelf to the reſt of my audience, and offer ſome apology to them for having made, what they may think, an encomium on my own order; an encomium to which they may alledge they are bound to pay but little regard. All that I ſhall ſay is, that an unjuſt panegyric is the ſevereſt ſatire. But if the view I have given of the conſtitution of this church be true, I have not improperly followed the Pſalmiſt's advice, to *walk about Zion, to tell her towers, to mark well her bulwarks, and conſider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generation following*; that you may impreſs on your own minds a ſenſe of the excellent church-government you are under, and may inculcate on your children and poſterity, a juſt eſteem of thoſe who have the charge of your ſouls, who *have not dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy*.

Let us then join together in fervent prayer to the King and Head of his church, who hath not only *fenced her with towers and with bulwarks, and adorned her with palaces, but hath*

made

made her all glorious within, that he would bleſs all his own divine inſtitutions, to the ſalvation of men, and the glory of his kingdom; and that whatever he hath left us to deviſe for the ſake of peace and good order, may, through him who alone inſpireth with wiſdom, conduce to the ſame great ends; that *our Jeruſalem may always have proſperity, and that the gates of hell may never prevail againſt her.* Amen.

SERMON II.

The Character of Chriſt.

By THOMAS MUTTER, V. D. M.

Preached at Wigton, before the Synod of Galloway, April 1745.

JOHN i. 14.

We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

WHAT the bulk of mankind call glory, is an empty blaze, of no intrinſic dignity, and of no conſiderable duration. A truly great man is apt to look down on this phantom, as a thing beneath his ambition. It was held in perfect contempt by him, who was the moſt perfect model of greatneſs and goodneſs that the human race ever ſaw. He affected no ſhowy appearance, he deſpiſed thoſe ornaments which make their court to the imagination. He ſtudied a more ſubſtantial thing, contenting himſelf with the ſilent charms of goodneſs and truth. *Theſe* he diſplayed with an inimitable luſtre: *in theſe* he placed his glory.

This deſcription of Chriſt is given by one who attended his perſon, who heard him preach, and who ſaw him live. This man, as well as his

his brethren, soon discerned a divine soul in his Master, under the veil of outward obscurity; and daily feasted on the contemplation of that liberal goodness, which he saw pouring out favours so freely on all denominations of people.

How emphatically does John begin the history of the Messiah! He begins with admiring him in *a point of view* vulgar minds seem least disposed to admire. He admires his *moral character*: he admires his goodness, veracity, and mercy. Though these are qualities, in which the *mean* may have their share, as well as the *great*; yet the Evangelist looked on these as the noblest strokes in the whole character of our Redeemer. The most pompous exertions *of power* disappear where these *better* endowments shine. In a word, they reflect so genuine a splendor, that every *other* glory dies away in their presence. There can be no need of any apology for chusing this passage as a proper subject for the exercise of this day. As we are the servants and ministers of Christ, pastors in the house of God, under the Great Shepherd and Bishop of souls; it readily occurred, that a discourse of this nature, planning out his life, or some of its principal features, could not but suit this occasion *well*. To represent what our Master actually *was*, is surely the best way of instructing us what we *ought* to be.

In handling this subject, it is proposed, through divine assistance,

1. To explain what is meant by grace, and what by truth.

2. To shew that these two in conjunction formed the character of the Messiah.

3. That where truth and goodness are united, there is a character of true glory.

I. We shall briefly illustrate what is meant by grace, and what by truth. This seems to be given as the characteristic by which the religion of Jesus is distinguished from that established by Moses: "The law was given by "Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus "Christ *." It is styled *Grace*, being a dispensation of mercy, fraught with gracious offers, propounded on easy and gracious terms; *Truth*, because it exhibits the true life and real substance of those ancient types which took place under the law. But we have no intention to consider these words in a relative view to any former œconomy: we shall take them in this one single light, as a personal character of Christ, exhibiting two of the most amiable qualities that can be supposed to enter into the definition of merit.

1. Grace at first hearing would seem to convey the idea of something more than goodness in general. They are distinguished, not by their nature, for they are essentially one and the same disposition, but by the state of the object. Goodness in a certain circumstance, and when exercised on beings of a certain complexion, is grace. Goodness toward the unworthy and the

* John. i. 17.

injurious,

injurious, toward apostate and degenerate beings, in whose behaviour there is no attraction, no merit, nothing to claim or invite the operations of goodness; I say, when goodness is thus circumstantiated, it falls under the particular denomination of *grace*. It may be termed grace, to intimate how *free* and undeserved it is. This, for the most part, seems to be the established notion of the word, whether as applied to God, or as applied to our Lord: "By "grace are ye saved *;" *i. e.* by the *sovereign mercy* of God; mercy not allured by worth, nor solicited by the fidelity of those on whom it was exercised. "The grace of God that "bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men†:" The grace of God, *i. e.* his *gratuitous* love, hath shone toward them on whose side there was nothing to deserve so kind an interposition. In like manner are we to understand the word *grace*, when applied to our Lord, "Ye know the grace "of our Lord Jesus Christ, that tho' he was rich, "yet for our sake he became poor, that we "thro' his poverty might become rich‡." By the word *grace* is here denoted, that sublime generosity of the Son of God, which moved him to undertake the human redemption, and to embrace chearfully the most forbidding steps subservient to it; that unparallelled kindness which determined him to leave his pre-existent glory and happiness, to pitch his tabernacle with men, that he might teach them truth and goodness by his life, expiate sin by his death, and finally instal them in possession of immor-

* Eph. ii. 8. † Tit. ii. 11. ‡ 2 Cor. viii. 9.

tality;

rality; that heroic benignity which induced him to act ſo generous a part, by which he uſed with the utmoſt tenderneſs all he converſed with, ſmiled at the infirmities of his friends, forgave the malice of his enemies, and expired in a generous prayer for their pardon: I ſay, it was this heroic good-will, ſo free and unmerited, that charmed the Evangeliſt, excited his admiration of Jeſus, and fixed his whole ſoul to the contemplation of ſo heavenly a character.

2. Having explained what is meant here by *grace*, I proceed to illuſtrate what is denoted by *truth*. Truth may not improperly be diſtinguiſhed into the following branches: truth with regard to opinion or doctrine, truth with regard to profeſſion, and truth with regard to action or conduct.

Truth with regard to opinion or doctrine, is, when our *notions* anſwer to *things*, when our opinions coincide with the life, and when there is ſomething in nature with which our ideas may be ſaid to quadrate and correſpond. To apply this to our Lord, is to ſay, that all the doctrines he taught were truths ſtrictly ſo called; the dictates of unerring wiſdom, flowing from the Father of lights, the great fountain of truth, with whom is no deception, nor any poſſibility of error.

Truth with regard to profeſſion, is when our ſpecious appearances are of a piece with our inward complexion.

This kind of truth takes place in that man who ſpeaks his real ſentiments, and ſays nothing

thing on any occasion but what his conscience dictates; who abhors dissimulation, and hates a lie as the foulest reproach that can be thrown upon human nature; who abominates all distinctions between a public conscience and private; whose behaviour above board is an authentic copy of his heart; the man in whom every show of devotion to God, every show of kindness to men, every show of zeal against vice, is derived from those parts whose sensations God only can sound. This acceptation of truth commonly goes under the name of *sincerity*; it is a foundation-virtue, a virtue of the noblest kind, highly ornamental to every soul where it resides. To apply this to our Lord, is to say, there was a perfect harmony between what he *really* was, and what he *outwardly* professed to be. He professed to be a friend to all kinds of virtue, an enemy to all kinds of vice, an enemy to avarice and deceit, to malice and cruelty, to formality and superstition, to dark enthusiasm, and hollow hypocrisy; all this he professed; all this he appeared to be; to say, therefore, he was full of truth, is at least to affirm, that these *goodly* professions did perfectly correspond with his *unseen* dispositions.

Last of all on this part of our subject, there is truth with regard to action or conduct; as when we say a man is true to his *charge*, true to the office and character with which he is vested. This acceptation of truth takes place in that man, who inviolately adheres to what he engages; whose attachment to his duty neither

ther the charms of gain nor the fear of loſs can diſſolve; who faithfully endeavours to execute that part which he lawfully aſſumed to himſelf, or which may be aſſigned him by a proper conſtituent, or which his condition may call for, and which God and the world are intitled to at his hand; the man whom no temptation can bias to the ſide of diſhoneſty, from whoſe eyes no vail can hide the blackneſs of treachery, and to whoſe ſoul nothing that is baſe can find an avenue, though under the maſk of prudence and intereſt. This is the man of truth: he is true to his *duty*, true to his *conſcience*, true to the part of a reaſonable and religious agent. To apply this to our Lord, is to ſay, that he *faithfully* diſcharged every part of that great function which had been aſſigned him by the Parent of nature.

Thus I have briefly explained what is meant here by *grace*, and what by *truth*. Theſe are comprehenſive qualifications; it may be ſaid, they are the *ſum* of moral excellencies, as they contain within them the united beauties of holineſs and candour, of charity, mercy, and friendſhip. But, in this degenerate world, how few are there who, *in life*, can make pretenſion to them! and as to thoſe few who may be ſaid, in ſome degree, to poſſeſs them, how lame at beſt are their exertions of goodneſs and candour! One indeed there was, who practiſed them in perfection; whoſe ſoul both grace and truth, in their fulleſt luſtre, combined to ennoble.

II. This

II. This brings me to the ſecond thing that was propoſed; to ſhew, That theſe two in conjunction formed the character of the Meſſiah.

1. He was full of grace. He came into the world upon the moſt gracious errand: "For "this purpoſe was the Son of God manifeſted, "that he might deſtroy the works of the de-"vil *;" that he might refine human nature, that he might reſtore man to the image of God, and put him into a new connection with the ſource of his being and happineſs. As he came into the world on the moſt ſalutary deſign, he gave an unremitting attention to it. His whole life was one uniform proſecution of the moſt benevolent plan.

The laws he gave, the leſſons he taught, all ſpoke him to be the friend of man. I know not one precept, or one inſtruction, he ever delivered, but what tended to make men more virtuous, more happy, more in love with God, more in love with each other, ſuperior to avarice, ſuperior to envy, ſuperior to all the low influences of a periſhing world. He pronounced the moſt gracious laws in the moſt gracious manner; he enforced them by the moſt gracious motives: for the moſt part he choſe promiſe rather than threatening, being moſt adapted to win the heart, and operate on the ſofter movements of human nature. Thus we may ſay he was full of grace in the capacity of a teacher and legiſlator.

Of the ſame preciſe ſtamp were all the ac-

* 1 John iii. 8.

tions

tions he daily performed. His whole entire life, his ſteady and habitual conduct, carried the moſt lively characters of ſympathy and favour imprinted upon it: he went always about doing good: he ſpent his life, not in fruitleſs endeavours, but in effectual good offices, in the higheſt degree beneficial to the ſouls and bodies of men. In him every other quality miniſtered to goodneſs, he made all the pomp of power a ſervant to mercy, and ſeldom or never exerted any ſhowy endowment, but in order to gratify the impulſes of love: *e. g.* he caſt out devils, and relieved an infinite number of poor wretches from their domination; he made the ſick whole, the blind to ſee, the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk; nay, he made the dead to riſe, and re-eſtabliſhed the vital union between ſoul and body after it had been diſſolved. Theſe things he performed, not once or twice, or a limited number of times: his deeds of this kind were ſo numerous, and ſurpaſſed all computation ſo infinitely, that this Evangeliſt uſes an hyperbolical figure to expreſs the multiplicity of them *.

As his daily and conſtant walk carried the law of kindneſs ſtamped upon it, ſo did his behaviour, on every particular emergency, breathe an uncommon benignity of ſpirit: *e. g.* how full of lenity was his conference with the Samaritan woman, whom he accidentally met at the well! Inſtead of harſhly upbraiding that perſon,

* John xxi 25.

or expoſing her crimes in the ſevere colours they might have deſerved; he barely puts her in mind of what ſhe had been, without ſeeming to have any intention but to aſcertain his prophetical character, and diſpoſe her to a belief of his miſſion from God; after which he proceeds, with great condeſcenſion, to ſhew her the miſtakes ſhe laboured under, to inſtruct her in the eſſence of piety, and lead her out of thoſe empty forms on which ſhe laid the ſtreſs of religion.

How benign was his anſwer to thoſe diſciples, who, boiling with reſentment againſt the people of Samaria, were for commanding fire from heaven, as had been done of old by Elijah, to conſume thoſe wretches who had the ſtubbornneſs to deny the Son of God that reception which all the ſons of men are intitled to! His anſwer was full of grace, becoming the meekneſs of the Lamb, who came to ſave, not to deſtroy mens lives. When certain of the diſciples thought proper, out of ſome kind of peeviſhneſs, to check parents for bringing their children to Chriſt, looking upon it as an ill-timed moleſtation, or as too familiar an intruſion upon ſo ſacred a preſence; how graciouſly does he interpoſe to encourage that freedom! "Suffer little children to come unto "me, and forbid them not*". With what tenderneſs does he embrace theſe living pictures of innocence! recommending their temper as an emblem of heaven, near akin to the ſtate of the bleſſed.

* Matth. xix. 13. 14.

It may be conſidered as a remarkable inſtance of his liberal ſpirit, and as announcing a friendſhip eaſy, open, and generous, neither ſoured with phariſaical pride, nor fettered with any kind of monkiſh auſterity, that he condeſcended to be one of the gueſts at a marriage in Cana; when, inſtead of uſing his preſence as a lordly reſtraint, he gave free vent to the ſocial mind, ſetting no other bounds to himſelf but ſobriety; nay, he thought it no proſtitution of his almighty power, to beſtow the firſt fruits of his miracles on that chearful occaſion, as if he had choſen to animate the company when they ſeemed to be well animated already.

Our Lord being invited by one of the chief of the Phariſees to eat in his houſe, was pleaſed to give him an admonition very expreſſive of that humanity which at all times actuated his ſoul. "When thou makeſt a dinner or a ſup-"per," ſays Chriſt, "call not thy friends, nor "thy brethren, nor thy kinſmen, nor thy rich "neighbours; leſt they alſo bid thee again, and a "recompence be made thee: but call the poor, "the maimed, the lame, and the blind; and "thou ſhalt be bleſſed; for they cannot re-"compenſe thee; for thou ſhalt be recompen-"ſed at the reſurrection of the juſt *." No body will ſuppoſe our Saviour intended that his words, in the letter of them, ſhould be obſerved. He can only mean to inculcate a well conducted beneficence toward the poor. Men ſhould not ſuffer luxury to prey on the vitals

* Luke xiv. 12. &c.

of

of charity, or to waſte the funds which enable them to do charitable things. The expence which the rich beſtow on entertaining the rich ought, according to our Saviour's mind, to be rather laid out in the channel of a wiſe liberality. Tho' they cannot invite the poor, the lame, and the blind, to their table; yet they can, and they ought to do things as conducive to their ſupport, as if they did literally invite them. This is a rational ſubſtitution: and though it may be a departure from the *letter*, it is ſuch a proper adherence to the *ſpirit* of our Redeemer's advice, as will, through his merits, procure us a recompence at the reſurrection of the juſt.

I know not a ſtronger inſtance of that goodneſs of heart, which may juſtly be ſaid to have characteriſed our Lord, than what is recorded in the 13th chapter of Luke. Some in the audience thought fit to mention to him thoſe Gallileans whom the Roman governor had butchered, at the time they were engaged in ſacrificing to God; likewiſe the eighteen Jews who were cruſhed to death by the tower of Siloam falling upon them. They who told him this piece of melancholy news, do not ſeem to have had the moſt favourable opinion of the poor men whoſe fate was ſo tragical: perhaps, from ſo ſevere and ſo uncommon a providence, they thought themſelves authoriſed to infer ſome uncommon demerit. But did Jeſus Chriſt fall in with their way of thinking? No: he took that opportunity to chaſtiſe, with great majeſty, every ſuch ill-natured commentator on the

providence of God. He ſummoned men to call *home* their reflections, and to turn their eye rather inward upon *themſelves*, than outward upon the miſconduct of others. "Sup-"poſe ye," ſays he, "that theſe were ſinners "above all the men that dwell in Jeruſalem, "becauſe they ſuffered ſuch things? I tell you, "Nay: but except *ye* repent, ye ſhall all like-"wiſe periſh." As if he had ſaid, "Let ye a-"lone the adminiſtration of God, and meddle "not with the ſecret reaſons by which infinite "wiſdom conducteth itſelf: this is a depth "not to be ſounded by the line of your under-"ſtanding. Neither meddle ye with the charac-"ter or ſtate of your brethren; eſpecially af-"ter they are removed from human cogni-"ſance: leave it to an higher hand to pro-"nounce what they are, to calculate their guilt, "and to proportion their puniſhment. Judge "charitably of *them*, but be ſolicitous for *your-"ſelves*: take *ye* care ſo to behave as you may "not fall by a ſimilar judgement, or one more "tremendous:" A divine inſtruction this worthy to come from ſuch an inſtructor.—— Theſe few inſtances, and innumerable more of the like nature might be adduced, are ſufficient to ſhow what a peculiar benignity of ſoul our Saviour breathed, not only in his habitual conduct, but alſo on every particular emergency that preſented itſelf.

If his daily actions manifeſted a moſt gracious ſpirit, were not his ſufferings a yet ſtronger evidence of it? Did not his death proclaim a-

loud

loud how earnestly he desired the happiness of men?——Some friends there are among men, who think it sufficient to *wish* well, without descending to *action*. Some friends there are, who can go some length too in action; but as to the affair of *suffering*, this they cannot so easily brook. But here is a friend that went the greatest possible length, not only in *wishing* well, but also in *doing* good; not only in doing good, but also in *suffering* evil. It may well be said, he was full of grace; when he gave his life a ransom for many; when he died for all, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God; that he might lay the foundation of a gracious covenant; by virtue of which, peace, and life, and all gracious privileges, are dispensed on the easiest and most gracious terms.

If, along with our Saviour's death, we take into the account his conduct toward those who put him to death, his noble mediation with heaven in their behalf; this will appear as consummate a stroke of generosity as can be figured by the imagination of man. We are charmed with those great men of antiquity, who returned the worst usage with benevolent deeds. Aristides, and some others, were banished by their country, after they had served her with fidelity. But how nobly did they behave under so provoking a trial! It was not in the power of any injury to dissolve their attachment to the good of the public. They forgave their fellow-citizens; and prayed the gods to avert every such calamity as might occasion

caſion them to need a ſecond time the ſervices they had ſo ill rewarded. This was truly great, far ſuperior to the ſize of the vulgar, only to be found in the ſoul of an Ariſtides, or ſuch kind of men.——But how far ſhort does this come of the inſtance before us!—Here is the Son of God, at the inſtigation of his countrymen, nailed to a croſs; ſuffering extreme torment of body, and extreme dejection of mind; reproach from men, deſertion from God, as if earth, and hell, and heaven, had all conſpired to ſink the innocent, and give the righteous the lot of the wicked: yet behold, this man, in the height of agony, pleads the cauſe of his murderers, and makes the beſt apology for the blackeſt action that ever was or will be committed. There is ſurely nothing to match *this* in the whole hiſtory of man. The human mind wants ſtrength to *admire*, let alone to *act* up to ſo heroic a model: "Then, ſaid Jeſus, Father forgive "them; for they know not what they do" *. Inſtances of Chriſt's divine ſpirit occur without number. I ſhall mention one memorable circumſtance more: While the bleſſed Jeſus hung on the accurſed tree, bleeding to death, there was an object there preſent who attracted his pious attention, and whom he recommended to the care and humanity of John, in circumſtances when he himſelf could not but feel excruciating pain, he then felt for his mother. His feelings were real. To have a doubt of

* Luke xxiii. 34.

this

this is impossible. It is not the way of dying people to counterfeit: they are *themselves* at that juncture; they bring forth their true sentiments, having *then* no idea of acting an assumed or spurious part.——So much for the first branch of our Saviour's character: He was full of *grace*.

SER-

SERMON II*.

The Subject continued.

JOHN i. 14.

We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

HAVING, in the former diſcourſe, attempted to handle the firſt branch of our Saviour's character, we now proceed to treat of the *ſecond:* He was full of *truth.* Truth we diſtinguiſhed into three branches; truth with regard to opinion or doctrine, truth with regard to profeſſion, truth with regard to action or conduct. All theſe our Lord unqueſtionably poſſeſſed in the higheſt degree.

The doctrines he taught were all truths in the ſtricteſt ſenſe of the word. As to thoſe principles in which the religion of Chriſt may be ſaid to coincide with the religion of nature, they come authenticated, if I may ſo ſpeak, by the ſeal of reaſon, and by the incorrupted dictates of conſcience.

As to thoſe principles which are of a ſuperior nature, and which lie beyond the inveſtigation of human diſcernment, they come atteſted by innumerable miracles, ſuch as ſpoke aloud the interpoſition of God, and carried his finger

* This and the former ſermon were delivered at once; but a pauſe was thought requiſite here, and therefore it is divided into two.

wrote

wrote upon them in legible characters. There was therefore the purity of truth in all the doctrines he taught, whether ſuch as are ſuppoſed to be comprehended within the ſphere of nature's light, or ſuch as ſeem to boaſt an higher extraction.

To ſuch as peruſe the goſpel with proper attention, Jeſus Chriſt muſt appear to be one of thoſe teachers, who love to ſay things which are *true*, not barely things which are *pleaſant*; and whoſe aim it is to inſtruct and reform, not to blandiſh or ſooth the corruptions of men. However fond the people might be of a pompous worſhip, and of external ſhow in religious ſervice, *the faithful and true witneſs* dictates that ſort of worſhip, which is moſt agreeable to the *nature*, and therefore moſt acceptable to the *will*, of the Deity: "God is a ſpirit, and "they who worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in "ſpirit and in truth *."

The Jews, eſpecially the Phariſees and ſcribes, were ſo ſuperſtitiouſly wedded to ceremonial duties, that they laid the great burden of religion *there*; but we find Jeſus Chriſt, with an honeſty and with a dignity becoming himſelf, always reverſing their doctrine. He denounces a woe upon them who pay tithes of mint, and cummin, and aniſe, while they neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy, faith, and the love of God †. He gave them to underſtand, that all things in

* John iv. 24. † Matth. xxiii. 23.; Luke xi. 42.

religion

religion are not of equal importance. Some duties are only the ſcaffold to goodneſs, the mere ladder by which we aſcend to intrinſic and eſſential worth. How emphatically does he diſtinguiſh the two! Theſe, ſays he, ye ought to have *done*, meaning the *moral*, and not to leave the other *undone*, meaning the *ceremonial* duties.

In the ſixth chapter of Matthew, where he is diſcourſing on the duties of prayer, faſting, and giving of alms, with what earneſtneſs does he caution his hearers againſt oſtentation, grimace, and formality! how ſolicitous is the Son of God that people ſhould mind the *internal* part of all duties, as that which conſtitutes their eſſence before the eye of Omniſcience! "When thou doſt thine alms," ſays he, "do "not ſound a trumpet before thee, as the hy- "pocrites do, that they may have glory of men. "Verily I ſay unto you, they have their re- "ward. But when thou doſt alms, let not thy "left hand know what thy right hand doth: "let thine alms be in ſecret, and thy Father "who ſeeth in ſecret, ſhall reward thee open- "ly.—When thou prayeſt,—enter into thy clo- "ſet.—Pray to thy Father in ſecret. Moreover, "when ye faſt, be not as the hypocrites, of a "ſad countenance: waſh thy face, and anoint "thine head, that thou appear not unto men "to faſt, but unto thy Father who is ſecret." Is not this ſpeaking like one who in all things was attached to *truth*, and who conſidered, that

the

the ſearcher of the heart, regardleſs of outward appearance, takes the character of men from the *inſide*, and not from the ſurface. It was candour that made our Saviour applaud the Roman centurion at the expence of his own nation: "Verily I ſay unto you, that I have "not found ſo great faith, no not in Iſrael." The ſame principle made him ſubjoin that generous doctrine, though he well knew how ſhocking it was to the narrow heart of the Jews: "Verily I ſay unto you, that many "ſhall come from the eaſt, and weſt, and ſhall "ſit down with Abraham in the kingdom of "God *." We find the bleſſed Jeſus, with unwearied importunity, ſoliciting *all* (for his good-will was no party affection, it was large and diffuſive as human nature) to accept the offer of life at his hand: "Come unto me, all "ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I "will give you reſt †."— "Jeſus ſtood and "cried, If any man thirſt, let him come to me, "and drink ‡."— "Ye will not come to me, "that ye might have life ‖." As a proof that he was *ſincere* in theſe ſolicitations, we find him ſhedding tears for the obſtinacy of men: "When he was come near, he beheld the city, "and wept over it, ſaying, If thou hadſt known, "even thou, at leaſt in this thy day, the things "which belong to thy peace! but now they are "hid from thine eyes **." How intent at all

* Matth. viii. 10. 11. † Matth. xi. 28. ‡ John vii. 37.
‖ John v. 40. ** Luke xix. 41. 42.

times

times was the Son of God on lifting the ſouls of men from grovelling purſuits to objects of true value, deſerving man's heart, meritorious of his warmeſt affection! He beſeeches them to "ſeek the kingdom of God in the firſt "place, and the righteouſneſs thereof;—to "hunger after righteouſneſs;—to lay up trea-"ſures in heaven, not on the earth;—to la-"bour for that meat which endureth to ever-"laſting life." When a certain perſon applied to Chriſt, aſking him to ſpeak to his brother, that he might divide the inheritance with him, his anſwer is altogether in the ſpirit of *candour*; and ſhewed that he wanted not to meddle with the *temporalities* of men, but to rectify their *diſpoſitions*. "Man," ſays he, "who "made me a judge or a divider over you?—Take "heed, and beware of covetouſneſs: for a man's "life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the "things which he poſſeſſeth *".—A precious ſentiment: that is, the true enjoyment and felicity of man's life, conſiſteth not in his outward poſſeſſions, nor in the extenſive quantity of them, but in things of a very different and ſuperior quality, in the practice of his duty, in the approbation of his conſcience, and in the ſmiles of that Being to whoſe domination conſcience is ſubject. Theſe are the true ſtandard by which man's life, in its moſt proper acceptation, ought to be eſtimated.

When our Lord performed his wonders, it is generally noticed, that he was moved, that he

* Luke xii. 14. 15.

had

had compaſſion, that he was moved with compaſſion *. The word is remarkably nervous; his *bowels* † were agitated. At the grave of Lazarus, it is ſaid, that he groaned in ſpirit, he was troubled, he wept. When he ſaw the funeral proceſſion of the widow of Nain's ſon, it is ſaid, he had *compaſſion* on her, and ſaid unto her, "Weep not ‡."—Jeſus called his diſciples to him, and ſaid, "I have *compaſſion* on "the multitude, (or, my heart feels for them), "becauſe they continue with me now three "days, and have nothing to eat: I will not "ſend them away empty, leſt they faint in the "way ‖." So that his miracles are conſtantly attributed to a *compaſſionate* heart. Now, on what pretence can any call in queſtion the *ſincerity* of his compaſſion? What man ever gave, or ever was capable of giving ſuch effectual proofs of an *unfeigned* good-will? Indeed, when men pretend to wiſh well, without manifeſting it by any proper exertion, and without putting themſelves to any coſt or trouble about it, we juſtly reckon it to be a *pretence*, and no more. But when they are careful to ſhow their good-will by good deeds, as far as their circumſtances permit, we then require no further evidence of their being ſincere. This evidence our Lord exhibited in the higheſt degree: his whole life was like one piece of beneficence: what elſe made he his daily buſineſs, but to diffuſe felicity, through the ſouls and bodies of

* Matth. xiv. 14. 15. 32. † Εσπλαγχνισθη. ‡ Luke vii. 13.
‖ Matth. xv. 32.

thoſe whoſe nature he had aſſumed? He who taught this ſublime leſſon, "It is more bleſſed "to give than to receive *," was undoubtedly bleſſed with that giving ſpirit which he recommended *. It muſt have been in the *ſincerity* of his ſoul, that "he went about doing "good." He felt, that to *give* is like the felicity of God, whereas to *receive* is but the happineſs of a dependent and indigent being.

As to Chriſt's profeſſions of piety toward his Father, it is impoſſible to doubt the *ſincerity* of them. His acts of devotion were attended with a certain circumſtance, which, in the common eſtimation of mankind, is always thought to ſtand in connection with candour. *Secrecy* is the circumſtance I mean. We read of innumerable acts of piety our Lord daily performed; at the ſame time, it is noticed, that he retired. He choſe to be *alone* in his intercourſes with the Parent of ſouls. This never was, and never will be the manner of hypocrites: they want to be ſeen, they want to be heard; they ſeek to alarm the eyes of the multitude, and to captivate the applauſe of the inconſiderate mob.

On what colour of foundation can any perſon alledge, that Chriſt's profeſſions of piety were *feigned?* Were theſe devotions which, it may be ſaid, he breathed every moment, all artificial? were they, like a looſe garment, politically aſſumed? If they were aſſumed, he muſt

* Acts xx. 35.

have

have aimed at ſome worldly and political ends; but if ever the human mind was, in any inſtance, ſuperior to theſe, the mind of Chriſt was ſuperior to them: his devotion, like a ſteady unextinguiſhable fire, accompanied him at all times, through all the days of his duration on earth; and ſhone with an uniformity no diſſembler was ever able to mimic. It adhered to him at his laſt moments, when all artifices are dropped: nay, it blazed forth with the greateſt dignity under the deepeſt cloud. At the dark hour, when he hung on the croſs, when he was about to breathe out his laſt, when he had none to look to but God;— to God he then looked, with ſo heroic and ſo uncommon a faith, as demonſtrated, that an uncommon intimacy had pre-exiſted between them. How pleaſantly, and even triumphantly, does he deliver up life! "He ſaid, It is finiſhed: "and he bowed his head, and gave up the "ghoſt *!" With what a holy and unſhaken confidence does he commend his ſpirit into the hands of him who is the Father of ſpirits †!

To mention no more, our Lord did, on all occaſions, profeſs a ſteady zeal againſt vice and unrighteouſneſs; and was not his behaviour toward the Phariſees, a demonſtration of the moſt conſummate uprightneſs?— The Phariſees were men of great influence. By an artful addreſs, by the outſide of devotion, and by an extreme delicacy in things of no moment;

* John xix. 30. † Luke xxiii. 46.

they had, by theſe methods, acquired a commanding ſway over the people. If, therefore, Jeſus Chriſt had any temporal views to promote, or any worldly intereſt to ſerve, or if he had been diſpoſed to play the politician in any reſpect, prudence would have induced him to make his court to theſe men: but he ſaw through theſe whitened ſepulchres; he ſaw they concealed the blackeſt vices under the paint of a glittering profeſſion; and therefore he chuſed to treat them with all manner of freedom, like one who was a ſtranger to the ways of flattery and diſſimulation.—He knew them to be covetous men, ſlaves to an unbridled avarice: he knew them to be ambitious men; haughty, overbearing, and ſupercilious; loving the uppermoſt ſeats, the moſt fulſome ſalutations, and every other diſtinguiſhing mark of human reſpect. It is therefore no wonder, if he reprimanded them with an edge and keenneſs totally out of his *ordinary* way. Now, to what other principle, but to the moſt thorough integrity; an integrity not biaſſed by any ſelfiſh view, or any corrupt deſire; proof againſt the influence of hope, proof againſt the influence of fear; that could not ſhape itſelf to exterior circumſtances, or comply with the times, or *play the laſt ambiguous game*: I ſay, to what other principle, but an invincible candour, ſhall we attribute his bold dealings toward the Phariſaical tribe? his laſhing that popular ſect in ſo ſpirited a way? To all others he was a *lamb*, to them he behaved like a *lion*, diſſecting

diſſecting their dark practices, unvailing their ſecret ſprings, and expoſing their many corruptions with a vehemence that hardly ever ſubſided. "Wo unto you, (ſays he), ſcribes "and Phariſees, hypocrites, who devour wi- "dows houſes, and for a pretence make long "prayers; ye ſhall therefore receive the greater "damnation *." As if our Redeemer had ſaid, "The hotteſt hell is prepared for you, "ye counterfeit worſhippers of God, who lift "up covetous eyes and rapacious hands to "heaven; and while you pretend to ſuperior "purity, do under that cover commit the moſt "cruel injuſtice, where the circumſtances call "you to ſhow the moſt tender humanity."

The laſt branch of truth is that of fidelity; as when a perſon is true to his *charge*, true to the office and character with which he is veſted. Does not this apply to Jeſus Chriſt in the higheſt degree? How *faithfully* did he diſcharge every part of the great function devolved upon him! "The Son of man came to ſeek and to "ſave that which was loſt;" to reclaim the rebellious; to redeem men from their follies and vices, and from all the deſtructive conſequences of them; to lead them on, as their captain, to glory, and to virtue, to righteouſneſs, to heaven, to God. He took the propereſt methods for effectuating theſe glorious purpoſes. This was his peculiar charge given him by the deſtination of the Almighty; and

* Matth. xxiii. 14.

to this he devoted himſelf with an unwearied zeal. Nothing could divert his attention from theſe objects, or cool the ardor with which he purſued them. He bravely faced every danger in purſuit of his duty, and ſtood the ſhock of the moſt ſevere ſufferings, with all the firmneſs of one who had no *other* concern, but to approve himſelf to that Being, whoſe wiſdom and goodneſs planned the redemption of human nature. When he was brought before the ſupreme court of the Jews, where the high prieſt preſided, he was adjured by the living God, to tell whether he was the Chriſt: his anſwer was explicit, "I am *:" he behaved with a magnanimity that ſhewed he held the bonds of truth inviolably ſacred; and that he preferred the honeſt part to all the impulſes of ſelf-preſervation, by which the fortitude of numbers hath been overpowered: in like manner, the Apoſtle, ſpeaking of the confeſſion he emitted before Pontius Pilate, calls it a good confeſſion †. The word ſignifies an honeſt or honourable confeſſion, brought forth by an integrity that dreaded no conſequence.

In that ſublime prayer which our Lord addreſſed to his Father a little before he ſuffered, are theſe remarkable words: "I have glo-"rified thee on earth; I have finiſhed the "work thou gaveſt me to do: and now, O Fa-"ther, glorify thou me with thine own ſelf," &c. Such language as this never became a human

* Mark xiv. 61. 62. † 1 Tim. vi. 13. την καλην ὁμολογιαν.

mouth

mouth but *his own*. If any man, from the day that God created man on the earth, ſhould *thus* juſtify himſelf, or ſay he was ſo perfect as this, would not his own conſcience give him the lie? How broken is the beſt obedience of the beſt ſervants of God! how mixed their purity and virtue! many days and hours but ſinfully ſpent. Many like blanks, not filled up with any thing that can do them honour, or give them peace on reflection. Jeſus Chriſt, and he *only*, could ſay, "I have finiſhed the "work thou gaveſt me to do." They are the words of one who was conſcious of *an untainted fidelity*; who knew he had now implemented his charge, and done it ſo *fully*, that his ſervices were every way commenſurate to the appointments of Heaven.—So much for the ſecond thing we propoſed to ſhew, That the bleſſed Jeſus was full of grace, and full of truth; that theſe two in conjunction formed his character. One would think the bare repreſentation of ſuch virtues, being ſufficient to manifeſt the dignity of them, might ſuperſede the laſt thing we propoſed; but as it is a matter of the greateſt importance, we ſhall proceed,

III. To offer a few things in ſupport of this plain propoſition, That where truth and goodneſs are united, there is a character of true glory.

1. One evidence of the glory of this character is, that the oppoſite is a piece of conſummate deformity. Let one ſet his imagination

to

to work, in order to find out the *baſeſt* of all characters, and he muſt needs land upon this, falſehood in conjunction with malice. Human nature recoils at the very idea. It is a proper deſcription of Satan: it is hell drawn out to the life.

2. Truth connected with goodneſs muſt needs conſtitute a glorious character, becauſe they are the ſource of dignity to every *other* endowment. No other quality is eſtimable without them. What a forbidding aſpect have power and diſcernment, without benevolence and candour! Penetration not circumſcribed by veracity, is mere cunning, and can be reckoned no better than vile fraud and deceit. Power disjoined from goodneſs, is a lawleſs and licentious ſword, inſpiring horror, and dealing deſtruction among all within its circumference. We are afraid of ſagacity, we are afraid of ſtrength, when they ſtand alone by themſelves; but ſo ſoon as we think they are lodged in benevolent hands, that moment we embrace them with ardor, and rely upon them with confidence, on account of the kind principle that conducts the exertion of them.

3. Truth and goodneſs conjoined give us the idea of a ſupreme glory, becauſe it is an imitation of the Supreme Being, in the moſt glorious of all his perfections. Even with reſpect to the powers of the earth, does the glory of a crowned head conſiſt in the extent of his power, or in the wideneſs of his dominions? No: it conſiſts in the benevolence and veracity which animate

animate his ſoul; in his diſpoſition to make thoſe happy over whom he preſides, in his fatherly care to protect them, to avert tyranny, oppreſſion, and every kind of miſery from them. And does not the King of the univerſe place his glory *there* too? "The kingdom of "of God, (ſays the Apoſtle), is righteouſneſs, "peace, and joy *." Moſt remarkable words! Though the heavens and the earth, and all the fulneſs of them, are the Lord's; though his empire takes in all worlds, and all nature, to ſpeak ſo, hangs on the word of his power; yet, mere dominion, mere ſovereignty, is not the kingdom of the Almighty. It is not what he reputeth his kingdom. Weak men, and men of daſtardly ſouls, are fond of power for power's ſake; but the greateſt of all beings hath other ideas of government. The kingdom of God, the glory of his kingdom, as he eſtimates himſelf, is *righteouſneſs, peace, and joy*. Is not this plainly ſaying, that as truth and goodneſs are the grand ſpring of his adminiſtration; ſo the prevalency of virtue and happineſs among his reaſonable ſubjects, is the ultimate intention of it.

4. Muſt not that be a ſolid and genuine glory which inſpires a ſolid and genuine happineſs? What an eſſential difference is there between *true* glory, and that which the world hath often dignified with *that* name? The laſt is but a falſe oſtentation: there is many an un-

* Romans, xiv. 17.

happy

King of Epirus, when at war with the Romans, gave to their general Fabricius! Fabricius had notified to Pyrrhus a perfidious plot laid for his life. So generous an office from the hand of an enemy, melted the King. At reading the letter of that illuſtrious Roman, he uttered with a kind of rapture, theſe words: "This is Fabricius. As ſoon will the ſun leave "his courſe, as he depart from the road of ho"nour and goodneſs." I may appeal to every man of ſenſe in this audience, if he would not prefer an encomium like this, and from the mouth of an adverſary, to all that ſuperficial glitter with which the undiſcerning are ſo apt to be charmed. In all ages, and among all nations of men, hath this character been held in requeſt; and it will always be held ſo through all the different periods of time, ſo long as human nature is conſtituted in the manner it is.

Finally, when time ſhall give place to eternity, this is the *only thing* that will be attended to by the Deity. No other quality, no other endowment, ſhall bear any price at his bar; but in proportion as it operated in due ſubordination to truth and benevolence. That infinite Being, who himſelf is endued with an eſſential goodneſs, and a never-failing veracity, will be ſure to ſmile on thoſe moral ſubjects of his, in whom he ſhall diſcern his own image: their reward is with the Lord; and ſuch a reward as ſhall become the King of nature to give, and the friends of the King to receive.

THUS we have endeavoured, as was propoſed, to ſhow what is meant by grace, and what by truth; that theſe two in conjunction formed the character of Meſſiah; that where truth and goodneſs meet together, there is a character of *true glory*. It remains, by way of improvement, that I take the liberty to remind you as well as myſelf, of the ſacred obligations we are under to imitate him who was full of grace and truth.

1. Let us ſeriouſly conſider, that we were early conſecrated to him. We are his diſciples by public profeſſion: we have devoted ourſelves to him by *ſolemn engagement*; and many of us by the *office* we bear in his church. Do not theſe conſiderations loudly call upon us to form *our* lives on the model of *his*. If, in the ſchools of learning among the Pagans and Jews, one had lived in contradiction to the maxims of the ſchool to which he belonged, how contemptible muſt he have appeared in the eyes of an impartial Judge? no leſs contemptible muſt we appear, if, amidſt our Chriſtian profeſſion, or under the ſacredneſs of the miniſterial character; we trample upon the eſſential laws of the Chriſtian ſchool, and degenerate from the life of our glorious Founder. It is eaſy for men to profeſs; but the world will take our character from ſomething elſe than profeſſion. The actions of bad men are a ſtronger proof that they are not Chriſtians, than their profeſſions can be that they are.

2. Let us conſider that to imitate him who

was full of grace and truth, is the beſt method we can take to recommend his religion, and to remove all prejudices againſt it. Numbers of people, inſtead of being at the pains to examine Chriſtianity, are apt to form their ideas of it from the lives of thoſe who ſay they believe it. Were it the fact, that our converſations are becoming the goſpel of Chriſt; that piety, veracity, and mercy, are interwoven with our habitual conduct; would not this diſpoſe the world to think well of an inſtitution that produced ſuch amiable effects? But when none of theſe virtues are to be ſeen adorning our walk; when the oppoſite vices of impiety, injuſtice, malice, and falſehood, are perceived to mix with our daily behaviour; what a fatal wound muſt this give to the cauſe of religion? how can the goſpel make progreſs, when ſuch a bar ſtands in its way? what a number of injurious reflections muſt it occaſion to be thrown on the worthy name by which we are called? and yet, perhaps, it is not impoſſible to find ſome zealous profeſſors dealing deep in theſe vices, as if Chriſt's religion were only a *name*; or as if the all-ſeeing Judge could be impoſed upon by grimace.

3. Intent ſhould all of us be on imitating the bleſſed Jeſus, if it were no more but in conſideration of his kindneſs to man. Hath he loved human nature to that degree which the goſpel declares: hath he teſtified his love by ſo expenſive an evidence as is there repreſented; ſhould not our beſt deſires go forth to meet

this

this beſt of friends? It is needleſs to ſay, that from love to imitation, there is an eaſy tranſition. We borrow, almoſt imperceptibly, the manners of theſe we have a thorough affection for.

4. Let us exert ourſelves more and more in reſembling our Lord, ſeeing we are furniſhed by himſelf with every neceſſary aid for that purpoſe. The frailty of our nature can be no apology for neglecting to walk as Chriſt walked. He hath promiſed his holy Spirit, on the eaſy terms of praying earneſtly for it. "Aſk, "and ye ſhall receive; ſeek, and ye ſhall find; "knock, and it ſhall be opened to you."

5. Let us ſtrive with all our might to be like our gracious Redeemer; conſidering that this is a neceſſary and eſſential preparation for the enjoyment of him. The bleſſed preſence of Chriſt conſtitutes the Chriſtian paradiſe. "It "is a being for ever with the Lord." From this every perſon perceives the neceſſity of reſembling him in this world, in order to our deriving happineſs from his company in the world to come. No agreeable ſociety can ſubſiſt between thoſe whoſe tempers correſpond not one to another. We are taught to conſider heaven as the conſummation of a holy and virtuous temper: there truth ſhall reign in its native ſimplicity: Candour arrives at an inviolable firmneſs: Devotion glows with everlaſting ardor: Friendſhip is above ſuſpicion, and knows no interruption to its fidelity. From this it follows, that if a man want goodneſs

and truth, he would be out of his element were he in heaven: "If I have not the ſpirit "of Chriſt, I am none of his:" of courſe my being *locally* with him, though that were permitted, could not render me happy.

Let us never loſe ſight of the great deſign of the paſtoral office; which is, that we may be inſtrumental in diffuſing the Chriſtian ſpirit, the ſpirit of love, righteouſneſs, and truth; and in keeping it alive on the earth as far as ſound doctrine, and a good example, may contribute to it. "Let us take heed to ourſelves, and to "the flock over which we have been appointed "overſeers." Let us beware of feeding, it may rather be ſaid *cheating*, the ſouls of men with the falſe diet of *ſound* and *grimace*. Let us beware of waſting our fire upon forms, or upon dark ſpeculations: let it be rather laid out in tranſcribing the life of the Son of God. Let us ſo contemplate the High Prieſt of our profeſſion, *as to be changed into the ſame image, from glory to glory*. Conſcious of our own imbecility, let us look to the Rock that is higher than we: let us conſtantly go on in the ſtrength of the Lord, breathing the humility he breathed, the meekneſs and devotion he breathed, the goodneſs, integrity, and friendſhip, he breathed; that when the great viſitation of human nature comes on, we may be found of him in peace, and *in our proportion* ſhare the dignity with which he is crowned.

To conclude, "Now are we the ſons of "God: now are we the ſervants and miniſters

"of

" of Christ; and it doth not yet appear what we
" shall be; but we know, that when he shall ap-
" pear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him
" as he is: " We shall behold his glory, the
" glory as of the only begotten of the Father,
" full of grace and truth. " The throne
" of grace and truth, the throne of God
" and of the Lamb, shall be there; and his
" servants shall serve him; and they shall see
" his face; and his name shall be on their
" forehead."

SERMON IV.

The fear of the Divine goodneſs.

By JOHN SCOTLAND, V. D. M.

HOSEA, iii. 5.

Afterward ſhall the children of Iſrael return, and ſeek the Lord their God, and David their king, and ſhall fear the Lord, and his goodneſs, in the latter days.

——*Shall fear the Lord, and his goodneſs.*——

THE prophet Hoſea was ſent to reprove the people of God for their idolatry and other ſins. He denounces againſt them the divine judgements; and, in particular, threatens them, as in the preceding verſe, with the loſs of all their public privileges, civil and religious: a threatening that was literally fulfilled, upon the people of the ten tribes, when they were carried captive by the king of Aſſyria; upon the Jews, when they were carried captive into Babylon; and afterwards, ſtill more remarkably, in their utter deſolation by the Romans. But in the midſt of their threatenings, theſe holy men the prophets are directed to mingle conſolation. They ſuggeſt to the choſen people the hopes of recovery upon their repentance; and this principally by pointing out

out the coming of the Meſſiah, that great deliverer, in whom their deſires ſhould center.

It was indeed foreſeen, that when he ſhould appear, the people of the Jews, diſappointed in their carnal expectations, would generally reject him. At the ſame time, it was alſo foretold, that the happy period ſhould arrive when, the eyes of their underſtanding being enlightened, they would as generally receive him, and "all Iſrael ſhould be ſaved *." And in the verſe where the text lies, the prophet gives an account of their behaviour on that occaſion: "Afterward ſhall the children of Iſrael return, "and ſeek the Lord their God, and David "their king," (the Meſſiah ſo called, of whom David was an eminent type), "and ſhall fear "the Lord and his goodneſs in the latter "days."

The phraſe, "ſhall fear the Lord and his "goodneſs," is a Hebrew manner of ſpeech, where a ſubject and its quality, inſtead of being connected under that form, are connected as two ſubjects. Thus Samuel reproving Saul for diſobeying the command of God, ſaith, "Stubbornneſs is as iniquity and idolatry †:" the ſame as if it had been ſaid, "Idolatrous "iniquity." And thus, in the paſſage before us, "to fear the Lord and his goodneſs," ſimply means "to fear the divine goodneſs."

As theſe words refer to the times of the goſpel, and are plainly deſcriptive of that ſpirit which belongs to the Chriſtian character, it

* Rom. xi. 26. † 1 Sam. xv. 23.

will

will be of importance for us to conſider this matter, and the uſe to which it ought to be improved. This, therefore, I ſhall attempt in your hearing.

"They ſhall fear the Lord, and his good-"neſs."

Perhaps it may be thought, that as goodneſs is the proper object of love, and the goſpel is the moſt illuſtrious diſplay of the divine goodneſs, it would have been fitter if the prophet had mentioned love, rather than fear, as the movement to be here excited. But the prophet knew well what he ſaid: he knew the falſe bias of the human heart, and ſuited his expreſſion accordingly. There is a fear belonging to the ſervice of an arbitrary maſter, which is the fear of a ſlave. There is a fear that men have in a tedious and rigorous ſervice, a failure in which ſubjects them to certain and preſent puniſhment; and ſuch was the fear of the Jews under the Moſaic law. But there is alſo a fear of which goodneſs itſelf is the object, and which very properly belongs to the diſpenſation of the goſpel. The mildneſs and mercy of that diſpenſation ſtrongly ſolicit our love. But love may be true, or it may be ſpurious. All men are naturally affected with the bleſſings of goodneſs; but all are not affected as they ought to be. And therefore, ſuppoſing men to love, in ſome ſort, the bleſſings of the divine goodneſs, the prophet takes care that their love be of a virtuous ſort, by ſuggeſting

the

the exerciſe of fear: of fear, by no means incompatible with love; but, on the contrary, an eſſential part of it.

The affection excited in our ſouls by the divine goodneſs, implies delight, reverence, and fear of offending: all which are intimately connected, and all of them included in love. For the love of God is a mixed affection; though, to mark the diſtinction between the ſeveral parts more ſtrongly, delight hath commonly appropriated the term love, while the other two have been expreſſed, as in the text, by fear. I ſhall be frequently obliged to ſpeak, for the ſake of accuracy, agreeably to this diſtinction; while yet it is the purpoſe of this diſcourſe to ſhow, that where love is genuine, reverence, and fear of offending, are neceſſarily implied.

When our benefactor among men is of a rank much ſuperior to our own, we look up to him with awe, as well as with love. And is not this natural and proper? or, on the contrary, muſt the one be ſuppoſed to deſtroy the other? Common language, one ſhould think, might teach men otherwiſe; and that it is the nature of love, in ſuch a caſe, to breed awe, while nothing is more uſual than to ſay of one who loves another, though an equal, or even an inferior, that he treats him with reſpect. When it is not a creature, then, but the Creator, the Moſt High over all the earth, who conferreth upon us the bleſſings of his goodneſs;

neſs; with what veneration ought our minds to be filled? How do all his glorious perfections then croud in upon our ſouls, conſtraining us to fall proſtrate before him, and to "fear "his goodneſs?"

The example of Jacob, who had received an extraordinary manifeſtation of the divine goodneſs, illuſtrates this ſentiment in a beautiful and lively manner: "And Jacob went out from "Beerſheba, and went toward Haran. And "he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried "there all night, becauſe the ſun was ſet: and "he took of the ſtones of that place, and put "them for his pillows, and lay down in that "place to ſleep. And he dreamed, and be-"hold, a ladder ſet upon the earth, and the "top of it reached to heaven: and behold, the "angels of God aſcending and deſcending on "it. And behold, the Lord ſtood above it, "and ſaid, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy "father, and the God of Iſaac: the land "whereon thou lieſt, to thee will I give it, and "to thy ſeed. And thy ſeed ſhall be as the "duſt of the earth; and thou ſhall ſpread a-"broad to the weſt, and to the eaſt, and to the "north, and to the ſouth: and in thee and in "thy ſeed ſhall all the families of the earth be "bleſſed. And behold, I am with thee, and "will keep thee in all places whither thou "goeſt, and will bring thee again into this "land: for I will not leave thee, until I have "done that which I have ſpoken to thee of. "And Jacob awaked out of his ſleep, and he

"ſaid,

" ſaid, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I " knew it not. And he was afraid, and ſaid, " How dreadful is this place! this is none o- " ther but the houſe of God, and this is the " gate of heaven *."

Here, ye ſee, was goodneſs in its higheſt luſtre. Heaven opened; the Almighty appearing; the holy angels miniſtering on the occaſion; while the Lord uttereth his voice, promiſing proviſion and protection to Jacob and his family; enlargement and grandeur to his poſterity; and, to crown all, the higheſt honour that could be conferred on a mortal, promiſing, that from him ſhould ſpring the Meſſiah, that " ſeed in whom all the families of " the earth ſhould be bleſſed." Muſt not the patriarch's ſoul have been now raviſhed with love? It was ſo raviſhed; but how? " And Ja- " cob was afraid, and ſaid, How dreadful is " this place! this is none other but the houſe " of God, and this is the gate of heaven:" as if his heart vibrated between reverence and delight. Theſe emotions were indeed intimately mixed in his ſoul; and under their joint influence he acts. He erects a pillar as a ſtanding monument of this gracious tranſaction, calling it Bethel, or the houſe of God; and makes a vow of perpetual and zealous obedience. This was in the true ſpirit of a favourite of Heaven, who could reflect wiſely where he had been, and how it became him to be affected; who felt, that in the place where God

* Gen. xxviii. 10.——17.

moſt eminently diſplayeth his goodneſs, there his majeſty is moſt illuſtrious: "The Lord is "in his holy temple: let all the earth keep ſi- "lence before him *."

Majeſty and goodneſs united ſtrengthen each other's influence. Great qualities in a benefactor enhance the value of his goodneſs, and his goodneſs enlivens the impreſſion of his greatneſs. On the other hand, if a man receive a favour from one whom he cannot eſteem, the obligation breeds a generous regret, a ſort of diſpleaſure with himſelf, which damps the ardor of his gratitude. Hence a grateful heart ſeeks to feel reverence: it is buſy, collecting all the great and reſpectable qualities of its friend; dwells on them with a pleaſing awe; is fond to magnify and proclaim them; and is cruelly diſappointed if it do not find them.

In this manner do the worthy receivers of the favour of God run ſpontaneouſly into thoughts of all his glorious perfections. His power and wiſdom, his holineſs, his juſtice, his truth, quickly penetrate their fervent ſouls, and take ſuch faſt hold, as if they felt the contemplation and eſteem of theſe to be neceſſary to complete their gratitude. Thus the divine goodneſs excites our reverence.

It excites, in the next place, a fear to offend: a ſentiment prompted by goodneſs, where-ever it appears. Strictly ſpeaking, it is when we receive a favour from one under the

* Hab. ii. 20.

notion of his being our ſuperior, that we are filled with reverence. But goodneſs, of itſelf, excites a fear to offend, and a ſolicitude to ſerve our benefactor. And though this be called a "fear" of his goodneſs, it holds of the nobleſt and moſt generous principle in our frame.

Man is born with a ſenſe of honour and ſhame. This works powerfully in all ingenuous minds; and perhaps there is no man who is not, more or leſs, moved by it. Now nothing excites this like the view or experience of goodneſs. Thus, we often find, that a man dare not, for ſhame, offer an injury or inſult to a worthy perſon, remarkable for the ſweetneſs and kindneſs of his temper; when, but for that appearance of goodneſs, he would have wreaked his malice againſt him with freedom. Even children, on occaſions that would have excited their peeviſhneſs and petulance againſt all others, are ſweetly wrought into ſubmiſſion to a father or a maſter, who, they know, hath been ſingularly good to them. Towards ſuch a one their young hearts are filled with ſhame, when they think of being froward.

It is conviction of a man's goodneſs that produceth in others this pleaſing and powerful reſtraint, and makes them ſolicitous to ſerve him. Can it be otherwiſe, when we experience the goodneſs of God? Will a ſenſe of honour and buſineſs thus ſway men towards human goodneſs? how then will it work to-

wards God, whoſe goodneſs is pure, unmerited, immeaſureable, and aided, in its impreſſion, in the higheſt poſſible degree, by the ſenſe of his greatneſs. The higheſt reverence joins the livelieſt ſenſe of ſhame, (for here, the ſenſe of ſhame, and fear of offending, cannot be ſeparated from the feeling of reverence), to prompt circumſpection and care, that we do nothing to offend ſo great a benefactor, and the utmoſt aſſiduity and zeal to do every thing to pleaſe him.

How degenerate, how far below the ſtandard of humanity, is that ſoul who is dead to the impreſſion of the divine goodneſs? and how naughty, if profeſſing to feel it, he find not himſelf ſo prompted by it?—Hath the hand of God been bountiful to thee? and who can ſay it hath not? who, among the moſt wretched, can ſay that he enjoys no good? doſt thou conſider, then, how free and undeſerved his bounty is? and is not thy thankful heart ſolicitous to pleaſe him? Art thou proſperous in thy affairs? doſt thou conſider, "who it is that giveth thee power to get "wealth*?" doſt thou reflect, from whom are derived thy food and raiment, thy houſes and lands, thine every poſſeſſion, and feel no concern about thy behaviour? Canſt thou forget God, and ſit ſecure in thy dwelling? "The "ſtone ſhall cry out of the wall, and the beam "out of the timber ſhall anſwer it, Wo to

* Deut. viii. 18.

"the

"the man * !" who rendereth not to the Lord according to his goodneſs.

In ſaying that a man is ungrateful, you ſay every thing of him that is bad. How we deſpiſe the man, who hath received favours from a worthy perſon, and hath no regard in what manner he is affected, or behaves to him! Perhaps he hath importuned and teaſed him, till he obtain what he aſked; and the moment after, hath no feeling but of the gift, and ſhuns the giver:—we turn from the wretch with ſcorn, as bereft of the ſpirit of a man, and abhor the thought of having any connection with one in whom the human character is ſo much degraded.

The feeling of gratitude, the moſt pleaſing that belongs to our frame, is intimately mixed with fear; and it is ingenuous fear that beſtows upon it activity and excellence. The honeſt heart labours with thoughts of his benefactor; cautiouſly ſhuns every thing that would offend, and anxiouſly purſues every thing that can ſerve him. And in proportion to the favour being greater, and the pleaſure ariſing from it more raviſhing, this caution and anxiety will increaſe. But, what favour can equal that which the prophet calls "the goodneſs of "the latter days?" The goſpel is God's unſpeakable gift: and as it is more than a diſpenſation of goodneſs, in the general ſenſe of goodneſs, even a diſpenſation of mercy to the miſerable; a ſacred ordination of heaven, "to

* Hab. ii. 11.

" preach glad tidings to the poor, to bind up " the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to " the captives, and the opening of the priſon " to them that are bound *:" and as the Son of God, to accompliſh this purpoſe, took upon him our nature, appeared " in the form of " a ſervant," underwent many hardſhips, and bare all manner of injuries, and at laſt, " hum- " bled himſelf, and became obedient to death, " even the death of the croſs †:"— think how our ſouls ſhould be affected? If a " love that " is ſtronger than death ‡," muſt conquer the heart; then, Chriſtians, behold the love of your Saviour, ſuperior to all the horrors of the moſt ignominious, cruel, and accurſed death!

" Depart from me, for I am a ſinful man, " O Lord ‖!" was the exclamation of Peter, upon the miraculous draught of fiſhes. He ſpake the language of aſtoniſhment: but, ſurely, the calmeſt ſenſe, if it be at all a true ſenſe, of the mercy of God in the goſpel, muſt fill us with the higheſt reverence of the divine majeſty, the deepeſt ſelf-abaſement, ingenuous ſorrow and ſhame for having offended him, fear to offend, and care to obey him, for the future.

The apoſtle conſiders this as natural and unavoidable; and he puts it to men themſelves, whether a contrary behaviour can bear any other conſtruction than that of deſpiſing his

* Iſ. lxi. 1. Luke, iv. 18. † Phil. ii. 7. 8.
‡ Song, viii. 6. ‖ Luke v. 8.

goodneſs.

goodneſs. "Deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his "goodneſs, and forbearance, and long-ſuffer-"ing; not knowing that the goodneſs of God "leadeth thee to repentance *?" "What ſhall "I render unto the Lord for his goodneſs †?" will be the anxious inquiry of every ſincere heart, when he reflects upon the goodneſs of God, in the ordinary courſe of his providence. —But the Lord hath redeemed our ſouls from deſtruction!— Is it poſſible for the ingenuous Chriſtian ever to forget ſuch a gift and ſuch a giver, or to be careleſs about his behaviour before him? Will not an honeſt heart within him concur with the Pſalmiſt, and ſay, "There is "forgiveneſs with God; that he may be fear-"ed ‡?" Yes: he will look up to his benefactor with eager eyes, mark well the aſpect of his providence, and the declarations of his word; receive, with glad ſubmiſſion, every notification of his will; and carefully ſtudy to imitate his example. Tenderly affected with the ſenſe of ſo much goodneſs, the thought of neglect or diſobedience will fill his ſoul with horror.

So fitly doth fear, including reverence, and care to pleaſe, correſpond to the view of the divine goodneſs. So nearly is this allied to love; and ſo efficacious a principle of all that is good and excellent in the conduct of life. Reverence, on one hand, guarding it againſt preſumption, and care to pleaſe, on the other,

* Rom. ii. 4. † Pſal. cxvi. 12. ‡ Pſal. cxxx. 4.

againſt ſupineneſs and negligence, make love to iſſue in a zeal to obey. Than this fear, therefore, what worthier principle can poſſeſs the human breaſt? Who will be careful of his duty, and attentive to the whole will of God? The man who fears the divine goodneſs. Who will poſſeſs purity of intention? who will join humility with zeal? who will act naturally, freely, and with vigour? who will perſevere, and abound in every good work? who will have ſobriety of temper, and equality of conduct? who can appeal to a calm and enlightened conſcience? in fine, whoſe religious principles may be at all times depended on? Whoſe, but the man's that "feareth the Lord "and his goodneſs?"

Much vain controverſy hath been held about fear and love, conſidered as principles of religious conduct; which could proceed only from mens miſtaking both the ſpirit of the goſpel, and the nature of the human mind. The true Chriſtian principle is neither love ſeparated from fear, nor fear ſeparated from love; but it is the one undivided affection which reſults from their perfect union. In the former caſe, fear and love may divide the empire of the mind between them, but have different objects, power and juſtice merely being the object of one, and goodneſs merely the object of the other. In the latter caſe, they coaleſce, and mutually interchange their objects. The good man loves God's righteouſneſs, and fears his goodneſs. Indeed, their very nature when u-

nited,

nited, is different from what it is when they are ſeparated: and the conſequences are ſuitable. Fear of God's power or juſtice, may induce a conſtrained, niggardly, inconſtant obedience; but fear of his goodneſs, an obedience cheerful, liberal, and uniform. On the other hand, love, implying mere delight, may be highly impaſſioned; love coupled with fear is enlightened, and ſerene. The former may be briſk and daring, but is irregular, and tranſient, and burns, like the lightning of heaven, only to conſume: the other is mild, regular, and ſteady, and glows, like the genial warmth of the ſun, to refreſh and ſtrengthen.

The conſequences of ſeparating fear and love are indeed more pernicious than many are aware of. How often hath it been ſeen, that when either of them prevails apart, it enervates the mind, miſleads mens apprehenſions of truth and duty, and lays waſte the conſcience. Particularly, how often hath that preſumption and ſelf-complacency, which ſome men falſely dignify with the name of love, exalted enthuſiaſts, in their own imaginations, above the neceſſity of regarding the divine law. Sometimes they have been known to ſay ſo; but, much oftner, what they dare not utter with their lips, they will ſpeak, however, inwardly to their own hearts. And ſo fruitful in reſources is a ſelf-deceived heart, that they can hide this preſumption from their own view, even under the guiſe of humility. They look as if they were afraid, leſt the notion of

obedience

obedience being neceſſary, ſhould appear like pleading a merit with God; as if to be true to what ye profeſs, was the ſame as to advance the moſt arrogant claim. Ye profeſs love to God; and we ſay, that, in conſequence of this, it is neceſſary that ye obey him: neceſſary, not by poſitive appointment, but in the nature of the thing; not becauſe obedience is impoſed as a taſk, or made the condition of obtaining reward, but becauſe it is natural and unavoidable, ariſing out of love itſelf. Yet ſo ill acquainted are theſe men with the genuine feelings of the human heart, or ſo biaſſed by a depraved diſpoſition, as not to ſee this. Tell me, then, have ye ever met with a man who did you a kindneſs? If ſo, was it not your ſtudy to pleaſe him? could ye have been ſaid elſe to love him? would not the one without the other have been juſtly deemed a mockery? and would ye not have thought yourſelves totally unworthy of his favour, if ye had had no regard, whether ye pleaſed or diſpleaſed him? "True: but God takes occaſion "from our ſins to exerciſe his mercy; and the "more numerous and heinous our tranſgreſ-"ſions, the more glory redounds to God in "pardoning them." Is this then, think ye, a reaſon for obedience, or for diſobedience? Do ye thus requite the Lord, O preſumptuous men! to plead a privilege "to ſin, that grace may abound*;" to "do evil, that good may come†?" The apoſtle

* Rom. vi. 1. † Ibid iii. 8.

will

will tell you, that your damnation is juſt. And let your hearts tremble within you, at the thought. Conſult your own hearts; for they will tell you feelingly, that nothing can be a juſter object of terror, than goodneſs ſlighted, and patience abuſed. And what is it to ſlight and abuſe them, if making them an argument for tranſgreſſion be not? Though the good man ſhould fail in his duty ſeven times in a day, through infirmity of nature, and ſurpriſe of temptation; yet how different from his is the caſe of the preſumptuous offender? Suppoſe a man, of good diſpoſitions in general, but hurried away through the violence of paſſion, ſhould offer an injury to a worthy perſon; and, the moment after, would give all the world to repair the injury, and be reconciled: the latter will readily pardon him, and may receive him into his friendſhip. But if another man ſhould injure him, confident of his peaceable and forgiving temper; and renew the injury, to give him an opportunity, as it were, of renewing pardon: what muſt we think? Can the good man conſider ſuch a conduct, in any other light than as adding inſult to injury? Will he treat this man as he did the other? And ſhould we not reckon it abſurd and mean, if he did? Shall we then call that wiſdom and goodneſs in God, which we account weakneſs among men? and can it be for this that ye love him? 'No: we do not 'ſay, that we love God, becauſe we think that 'indulging in ſin is pleaſing to him; but be-

'cauſe

'cauſe this will not hinder our acceptance 'with him.' And what, I beſeech you, is the meaning of this? Is it not that ye look upon ſin as odious to God, and, at the ſame time, as not odious; and that ye love him for both? "But while God hates ſin, he loves the "ſinner!" Tell me, then, is it for continuing a ſinner that he loves him? or for turning from ſin, and doing his will?

How long will infatuated men contradict the feelings of their hearts, the dictates of conſcience, the expreſs and repeated declarations of ſcripture? How long will they blaſpheme God by their vain arguings? But the reaſon is plain: they have no mind to "crucify the fleſh, "with the affections and luſts *:" and becauſe God is good, they would fain perſuade themſelves there is no need. But is this the ſpirit that actuates the child of God? On the contrary, the more he hath "taſted that the Lord "is gracious †," the more he loves him; and the more he loves him, the more jealous he is over his own conduct; and though he hath no ſlaviſh dread of God's juſtice, is he therefore without fear? No: he fears his goodneſs, like an ingenuous ſon, that fears to offend an indulgent parent. He hath "not received the ſpirit "of bondage to fear," like Jews under the law; he hath "received the ſpirit of adoption ‡!" But as the fear of a Jew, to be acceptable, was to be mixed with love; ſo the love of a Chri-

* Gal. v. 24. † Pſal. xxxiv. 8. ‡ Rom. viii. 15.

ſtian,

ſtian, to be true, muſt be mixed with fear: for, when it is ſaid, that "perfect love caſteth "out fear *;" this muſt be underſtood, either of ſervile fear, which is plainly incompatible with love; or if it be intended of all fear, then perfect love is perfect virtue, and is therefore to be expected in another than an imperfect ſtate. Love indeed is, even in the preſent ſtate, the prevailing principle of the improved Chriſtian's conduct: but a principle that works in him, not to the excluſion, but as the cauſe of fear; and in conſequence of this, as the cauſe of every thing worthy and good in the tenor of his life.

Thus, in the well-formed mind, fear and love are coincident; or are only two views of the ſame principle that run into each other. They may be diſtinguiſhed, but are never to be ſeparated: the moment that love is disjoined from fear, it is love no longer; it is falſehood and preſumption.

Happy had it been for the virtue and welfare of men, if the matter had been always duly conſidered in this light. For then the nature of love would have been better underſtood, in which "whoſoever dwelleth in love, "dwelleth in God, and God in him †:" of that "love which is the fulfilling of the law; the bond "of perfectneſs ‡." Then would have been ſeen, what fear is unworthy of a Chriſtian, and what is honourable in him. Then the excel-

* 1 John. iv. 18. † 1 John iv. 16.
‡ Rom. xiii. 10. Col. iii. 14.

lency

lency of the Chriſtian ſpirit would have been fully aſcertained; and the characters of the truly good, and of mere pretenders, more eaſily diſtinguiſhed.

"Why call ye me, Lord, Lord," ſaith our Saviour, "and do not the things which I "ſay *?" Why profeſs ye zeal for Chriſt, and delight in his bleſſings, without care to fulfil his will? When we pretend love to Chriſt, without care to obey him, we attempt to ſeparate things that are inſeparable. For, if what hath been explained in this diſcourſe be juſt, or if the authority of an apoſtle, who ſaith, "This is the love of God, that ye keep his "commandments †," be of any weight; love apart from obedience, is not improper; it is impoſſible.——But ſuppoſing it poſſible; think how mean and worthleſs ſuch a ſpirit muſt be. In common life, the man that puts off his benefactor with fawning and flattery; perhaps feels ſome little tranſient warmth of affection, but hath no ſolicitude to ſerve him, diſcovers a baſeneſs of ſoul, which every one deteſts. And can it be otherwiſe in matters of religion? "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, "thy law is within my heart ‡:" this is the language of the true man, whoſe heart is worthily affected with the ſenſe of God's favour.—And is "his delight in the law of the "Lord ‖?" doth the pleaſure he feels in love to God for his goodneſs, make him eager to

* Luke vi. 46. † 1 John v. 3. ‡ Pſal. xl. 8.
‖ Pſal. i. 2.

receive and obey his commands? then his delight is placed on the ſureſt foundation; and, far from being diminiſhed, is eſtabliſhed and ſtrengthened, by his "fear of the divine good-"neſs." Fear, prompted by goodneſs, is the ſource of ſober and ſolid joy. "Fear," ſaith the apoſtle, "hath torment *;" but that is the fear of a ſlave; while the fear that is excited by goodneſs, and ſprings from love, marks the condition of a ſon, a condition of freedom and happineſs. The hypocrite,—he too hath his joy; and this perhaps, at times, will be ardent and rapturous. But how vain and contemptible is it? void of ſentiment, holding not of our reaſonable, but of our animal nature, tumultuary and fleeting. For, "can the ruſh grow up without mire? can the "flag grow without water? He is green be-"fore the ſun, and his branch ſhooteth forth "in his garden: but his root is rottenneſs, "and his bloſſom ſhall go up as the duſt †." Whereas the good man is "like a tree plant-"ed by the rivers of water, that bringeth "forth his fruit in his ſeaſon: his leaf alſo "ſhall not wither; and whatſoever he doth "ſhall proſper ‡."

Would ye therefore, Chriſtians, attain genuine ſtrength, and excellence of character? would ye acquire enlightened, ſubſtantial, and manly joy? would ye arrive at the perfection of your nature? Think ſeriouſly, I beſeech

* 1 John. iv. 18. † Job. viii. 11. 16. Iſ. v. 24.
‡ Pſal. i. 3.

you, what the goodneſs of God demands of you. Ye profeſs to love him: ye do well. But "if ye call on the Father, who, without "reſpect of perſons, judgeth according to e-"very man's work, paſs the time of your ſo-"journing here in fear *." And as many as walk according to this rule, "peace be on "them, and mercy, and upon the Iſrael of "God †."

* 1 Pet. i. 17. † Gal. vi. 16.

SER-

SERMON V.

Heart-Bitterneſs.

By THOMAS SOMERVILLE, V. D. M.

PROV. xiv. 10.

The heart knoweth his own bitterneſs.

PROVIDENCE, ſeemingly ſevere in ſome inſtances, at the ſame time bears the moſt affecting marks of mildneſs and compaſſion to our nature. If it has allotted afflictions to mankind, it has at the ſame time appointed many alleviating circumſtances, to check and diminiſh their bitterneſs. What a gracious fund of conſolation is provided for the miſerable, in the kind affections of their fellow-creatures! How often has the oppreſſed mind entirely diſcharged its ſorrows, by laying them open to the ſoothing influence of a compaſſionate heart! The moſt joyful ſenſations have been derived from afflictions, whilſt they have given occaſion to taſte the ſweeteſt and moſt tender effects of friendſhip.

There are, however, ſome inſtances of ſorrow which cannot avail themſelves of theſe advantages, either becauſe the world is not qualified to enter into them, or becauſe they voluntarily reject ſympathy, and every mean of conſolation. This is the caſe when the cauſe

of affliction is not underſtood or approved, or when the affections play in oppoſition to one another, and vanity, ſhame, reſerve, and diſtruſt of mankind, lock up our ſorrows, and reject all intercourſe with ſociety. Like the hopeleſs patient, who refuſes to comply with the ſalutary preſcriptions of his phyſician, they ſtand out againſt the bounty of Providence, and put themſelves beyond the reach of human aſſiſtance. Both of theſe may be underſtood to be implied in the text. Indeed in ſome inſtances they run into one another.

It has been juſtly obſerved, that to fall in with afflictions is the moſt effectual method to ſoothe and relieve them. When the wound is ſtruck deep, reaſon is overthrown, argument vain, and through the affections only we can have acceſs to the heart. It may be of uſe, therefore, to delineate ſome of the moſt affecting caſes of heart-bitterneſs, and to propoſe particular remedies to mitigate and remove them.

1. Of unrevealed and neglected ſorrows, there are none more ſevere than thoſe which proceed from a ſtrong natural propenſity to melancholy and dejection.

As wounds which are occaſioned by external violence, are more conſpicuous, but leſs dangerous, than the hidden diſeaſe which preys upon the vitals of the man; ſo thoſe cauſes of ſorrow which openly ſolicit the compaſſion of the world, are often frivolous in their effects, when compared to the lurking oppreſſion of a dark and deſponding mind.

There

There are ſome of our fellow-creatures encompaſſed with every circumſtance of proſperity, and yet, alas! they are not, they cannot be happy! Their countenance is overcaſt with gloom: they are ever diffident, joyleſs, and deſponding. To ſuch Pleaſure has loſt all her attractions. They are deaf to the voice of the charmer, though he ſhould charm ever ſo ſweetly. The diſeaſed eye becomes inſenſible to the varied complexion of nature, whilſt it diſcolours every object with its own inherent ſtain. The mind, feeble and diſconcerted, ſpreads its malignant tincture over every ſurrounding proſpect, throws a dark veil upon the moſt comely objects, and has rendered even the alluring countenance of Religion deformed, awful, and forbidding.

Surrounding ſpectators form their opinions merely from external circumſtances. They think that our feelings ought to be regulated by our fortune; that our joy ought to be no leſs, and our ſorrow no more, than what our circumſtances are calculated to produce. Hence, they cannot give their ſympathy where they cannot obſerve ſufficient cauſe of miſery.

But were they ever ſo much diſpoſed to give it, this miſerable man would have none of their comfort: he flies from buſineſs, amuſement and ſociety; he is up in arms againſt himſelf; he is active only that he may thwart every ſcheme that might tend to diſpoſſeſs the approved enemies of his peace.

2. But next we are to produce a claſs of men, who might, perhaps, ſucceed better in the ſympathy of the world, could they but tell the cauſe of their ſorrow.

Here is a man ſo changed from what he formerly was, that his friends are almoſt at a loſs to know him. He was once chearful, and open, and happy: he now wears the face of anxiety; he is become reſerved, ſullen, and unſociable. Whence ſo great and ſudden tranſformation? Diſappointments in a long train have fallen upon his head. He ſtruggled to deſpiſe them. It was in vain. The manlineſs of his ſpirit is at laſt broken, and he has ſurrendered himſelf a willing ſubject to fretfulneſs and deſpair. Much he boaſted of the influence of his friends. Many pompous expectations were reared upon their flattering promiſes. The world gave him large credit for intereſt; and all is come to nothing. Pride ſtifles his ſorrow, and he is aſhamed to confeſs, that he has been ſo weak as to put his confidence in lies, and expect ſo much where he has found ſo little.

But it is not merely the diſappointment of preferment that goes near his heart. Ambition defeated may fret and chagrin the aſpiring mind. New friends and new projects may again amuſe and reſtore the mind to its wonted ſprightlineſs and elevation. But affection diſappointed gives a deep and incurable wound to the feeling heart. Here he had given away the moſt diſintereſted attachment of his heart; here

here he was ready to dedicate his life. He wiſhed for no other recompence but a return in kind. He would have thought himſelf overpaid, and but too happy, if he had been admitted to ever ſo ſmall a ſhare of the eſteem and love of thoſe whom he wiſhed to pleaſe. He has found that the claims of intereſt have prevailed over thoſe of affection. His moſt ſincere ſervices have been diſregarded; he has found too late that he has been unfortunate in his connections, and has caſt away that zeal and attachment which would have been precious to a ſenſible and diſtinguiſhing mind. The diſappointment of eſteem renders ſuch affliction doubly grievous to a virtuous mind. It gives unſpeakable pain, to find any part of mankind worſe than you had believed them to be; to meet with ſelfiſhneſs, deceit, and inſolence, where you expected generoſity, ſincerity, and tenderneſs. This unavoidably inſpires us with a more unfavourable opinion of mankind in general, and ſhakes that benevolence which is the great foundation of public uſefulneſs and home ſatisfaction. Perhaps that malice and envy which ſecretly pointed at ſuch men in the ſunſhine of proſperity, openly break forth to avow their triumph, and give new poignancy to his diſappointment.

3. But there are inſtances of affection being diſappointed yet more affecting than what we have now deſcribed. It was fixed more naturally and more ſtrongly; and therefore has been the cauſe of more ſenſible uneaſineſs.

Perhaps

Perhaps one object attracted the eſteem and love of your hearts in preference to all the world beſides. It ſeemed eſſential to your happineſs. Riches, honours, and all that the world counts upon as good and deſirable, were deſpiſed when put in the balance with this. You might, without vanity, flatter yourſelf with ſucceſs.

It would have been the labour and joy of your life to have been grateful, and to have made unbounded returns of affection and happineſs. Unaccountable caprice, intereſt, or ambition, have ſlighted your moſt tender regards, and occaſioned the moſt bitter diſappointment of your life. The ſubject is too delicate to be laid open to the world. It were eaſier to die than throw off that weight of native modeſty which ſuppreſſes all utterance and complaint. Perhaps you too juſtly apprehend, neglect, and ridicule, where indeed you moſt require the balm of a ſoft and condeſcending heart.

Your ſorrow cannot vent itſelf to mankind. It recoils with greater violence, and, ſilent and unſeen, lays waſte the inward tranquillity of your mind. Time only, and the buſineſs and attachments of ſucceeding life, may give that relief which you cannot aſk or expect from the world.

4. The man who ſecretly mourns for the treachery of a friend, may ſeem to have a more ſerious claim to the ſympathy of the world, than any of thoſe I have already produced.

My

My affection was not given away to the great, who might have had any intereſt in deceiving me. It was not directed by caprice, or raſhly fixed without deliberation and experience. Here was the appearance of every thing worthy and amiable. Could I with-hold my friendſhip? I had reaſon upon trial, to be pleaſed with my choice. Hence I derived the pureſt pleaſures of my life. In return, could I do leſs than give all my confidence and affection? Contrary to expectation, you have found coldneſs and reſerve, perhaps treachery and contempt. Whither ſhall I now betake me for conſolation? I have no friend. Sad experience has inſtilled a jealouſy and diſtruſt of mankind, and cut off my wonted reſource in the day of calamity. My bitterneſs ſhall be known only to my own heart.

5. Akin to what I have now deſcribed are domeſtic ſources of uneaſineſs, which, as they are unavoidable, and continually preſent, are the more ſevere, and, for reaſons I ſhall immediately mention, concealed with the greateſt induſtry from the knowledge and ſympathy of the world.

Happineſs muſt begin at home. It is natural for every man firſt to ſeek it there. How pitiable our ſituation, if folly, peeviſhneſs, and contradiction of humours, in the perſons with whom we are inſeparably aſſociated, has baniſhed our peace, and poiſoned the fountain from which we expected to draw the ſweeteſt ingredients of our life! To tell our bitterneſs were

to publiſh our own diſhonour. As if our miſery were not enough, we muſt increaſe it, by ſubmitting to the painful violence of conſtraint and diſſimulation. We muſt hypocritically put on the countenance of chearfulneſs, in order to conceal the gloom of our mind, and ward off the reproach in which we ourſelves muſt ſo largely partake.

6. Again, in a ſimilar ſituation are thoſe who have gone out of the ſtation and employment to which they were by nature beſt fitted, and are of conſequence appointed to act and go forward in life with a ſet of men whoſe taſte and diſpoſitions run contrary to their own. The ſentiments and conduct at variance, certainly occaſion the moſt violent commotions in a man's own breaſt, and make an irreparable breach upon his peace of heart. In ſuch a caſe, that natural liberty which is the firſt quality in happineſs, is deſtroyed. All is force, and unnatural compulſion; and the man dare not complain, or tell his miſery, without incurring the diſlike and reſentment of thoſe upon whom his happineſs moſt immediately depends.

7. Allied to theſe, but far more worthy of approbation, is the man who carries grief in his boſom, upon account of conſcious imperfection, and inconſiſtency of character. He has approved the better part; he has reſolved and profeſſed to purſue it; he is deeply convinced he can never elſe be happy; and yet ſome ſtrong predominating paſſion ſtill holds him faſt in the fetters of vice.

He

He has often reſolved upon reformation, tried many expedients, made head againſt many temptations: he has as often failed, and relapſed under the dominion of ſin. This has occaſioned miſerable agitation and perplexity of ſoul.

The world again who ſee the outſide of things, ſpeak fair of his virtue, and wonder only that the due effects of peace and joy are not more conſpicuous and acknowledged. This confounds and perplexes him the more. He mourns in ſecret, that he is not ſuch as his own reſolutions, and the world around him, would have him to be.

8. It muſt affect every one of reflection with deep concern, to find, that a great proportion of ſecret ſorrow falls to the ſhare of thoſe who are moſt uſeful, and deſerve beſt from ſociety.

When I tell you, that it is an old obſervation, that no calamity bears harder upon the mind than ingratitude, you will underſtand who they are that now claim your attention. Were I to dwell only upon higher examples, what a large group of heroes, patriots, and martyrs, have gone off the ſtage of this world, bewailing, that the brave and diſintereſted ſchemes to which they dedicated the attention and labour of their whole lives, have been fruſtrated by the malice and ingratitude of the men whom they were intended to ſerve? If we conſult hiſtory, what nation has not, in its turn, come ſhort in paternal affection, and deſerved to be

be branded with the charge of ingratitude, whilſt it has ſuffered the glories of human nature, and its own beſt benefactors, to languiſh in poverty, exile, and contempt? Poſterity have bluſhed at the prejudices of their fathers. Praiſe and encomiums have been laviſhed upon their memories; but what avail praiſe and encomiums upon thoſe who are ſilent in the duſt?

But it may be of more uſe to my hearers to ſpeak of more humble and domeſtic beneficence: Who has had the happineſs to deal ever ſo little in the commerce of good offices, without experiencing at the ſame time the misfortune of ingratitude and ill returns from men? Here was a man who lived but to do good. Many have been advanced to proſperity, and the notice of the world, who muſt have lain hid in meanneſs and obſcurity, had it not been for the unwearied protection and friendſhip with which he cheriſhed them. They have forgot the rock from which they were hewn. The remembrance of a benefactor lives not in their hearts.

Some have exhibited more active and enormous ingratitude. Their hand has been lifted againſt the man who armed it with power. Their reputation and influence have been impiouſly exerted to ſhake the very foundations upon which they were originally erected. A generous mind abhors the meanneſs of complaint and upbraiding. The very principle which would moſt ſucceſsfully beſpeak the ſym-

pathy and conſolation of mankind, with ſurpaſſing greatneſs hides it from their view.

Beſides, it is the misfortune, or, ſhall I rather ſay, the glory of ſuch a mind, to have but too delicate ſentiments of his connection with mankind. His affliction is augmented upon account of the vices of thoſe to whom he conſiders himſelf ſo nearly related; and he conceals their crimes, and the cauſe of his own bitterneſs, with all the tenderneſs and anxiety with which he would any miſcarriage or deformity that muſt reflect ſhame upon his own family.

To the common feelings of humanity, add the more endearing ties of blood, and you have the idea of the moſt aggravated ſorrow that human nature can poſſibly ſuſtain. Suppoſe a tender and indulgent parent diſappointed of the child of his love; ſuppoſe that the beſt and moſt prudent admonitions have been thwarted, the moſt affectionate indulgencies caſt away; and he meets with nothing but impiety, treachery, indolence, and ingratitude, where he fondly anticipated virtue, uſefulneſs to mankind, honour to his family, the ſweeteſt returns of gratitude and love to himſelf. There are inſtances where language falls infinitely ſhort of the feelings of men, and where the ideas and ſympathy of others, muſt be confined to what is expreſſed, or to what they themſelves have experienced. In the example I have now put, it may be ſaid, in a peculiar ſenſe, "that the heart knoweth its own ſorrows;" becauſe, though it were not diſpoſed to keep

them cloſe, for the reaſons above mentioned, yet it muſt want words to convey them to others in their full force, and no untried ſpectator can ſufficiently conceive the wringings and agonies of a heart torn with filial ingratitude.

In ſhort, were I to enlarge upon examples, were I to diſcloſe the multiplied ſources of heart-bitterneſs, were I to point out the peculiar diſadvantages of every ſtation and employment, the cruel ſtings and mortifications to which worthy dependence muſt ſubmit, the rubs and ſecret anxieties from which even proſperity and ſucceſsful ambition cannot be exempted; all of which, ſhame and pride have covered with an impenetrable veil from the inſpection of mankind; we ſhould then be well ſatisfied, that a large portion of ſorrows lie for ever entombed in the hearts of men: we ſhould be ready to acknowledge, that Providence, often impiouſly arraigned, has diſperſed happineſs with a more equal and impartial hand; that all mankind are more nearly upon a level; that we often form falſe opinions of the happineſs of others, and often idly envy ſtations and employments, where hidden ſtings continually aſſail their miſerable poſſeſſors.

But it is not enough that we ſuppreſs envy and diſcontent in our own minds. Remember we are made to bear one anothers burdens, and to mourn with thoſe that mourn. Hence, thoſe ſighs and tears which wait upon the tale of miſery. Theſe are not to be thrown away in a corner: they immediately relieve; they

are

are intended to excite us to more active and effectual aſſiſtance. Let us never think it enough, that we exerciſe theſe upon more palpable occaſions of diſtreſs accidentally thrown in our way; but let us induſtriouſly ſeek out the ſhy and concealed mourner. With tender and artful condeſcenſion, let us remove the thick and cruel diſguiſe in which obſtinate and determined grief hath fortified itſelf. Let us with a charitable delicacy, addreſs thoſe ſorrows, which, from very exceſs, deſire not to be ſuſpected by the world. It is with real uneaſineſs that I obſerve, that a ſort of conduct, quite the reverſe of what I now recommend, prevails in the world. Men of a broken and dejected ſpirit, are neglected or ridiculed by the world, becauſe they cannot approve the cauſe of their uneaſineſs, or perhaps think that they ought to be happy. They may indeed be to blame; but, alas! are they not puniſhed in their very crime? are they not unhappy? is not that enough? Any intimation of ſympathy or attention upon the ſide of their fellow-creatures, might, perhaps, draw out their confidence, and extinguiſh the malady whilſt yet in its infancy; but neglect and harſhneſs cruſh their feeble hopes, and deliver them up a conſenting and deſperate prey to the diſeaſe of their own minds. Is this the temper of a religion which gives a bleſſing to mourners? Is it like the followers of the meek Jeſus, who never bruiſed a broken reed, nor quenched the ſmoaking flax.

To you who have felt the bitterneſs of a broken ſpirit, I would next addreſs myſelf. Take care, on your part, that you do not decline the kind advances of the generous heart, and give way to the dangerous influence of a reſerved and ſuſpicious temper. Theſe unhappy diſpoſitions frequently begin, and carry on, the fatal diſeaſe which I have now deſcribed. Nothing can do well out of the courſe marked for it by nature and providence. The buſy mind of man, if not cultivated with employment and ſocial intercourſe, will naturally ſhoot up into wild and dreary imaginations. Gloomy thoughts, if not inſtantly diſcharged into the boſom of a friend, will ſtrike deep root, daily multiply their kind, and at laſt overwhelm the mind.

But for this, and a variety of other reaſons, habits of devotion, and frequent intercourſe with the Deity, are to be recommended as the moſt effectual method to relieve the concealed bitterneſs of the heart.

The caprice of our fellow-creatures may require much previous ſuſpenſe; and, after all, render our ſucceſs at their hands precarious in the iſſue. The high value which they put upon their favours, and the overcharged tribute of gratitude which they exact, may diſcourage timid minds from following out their natural inclinations to have recourſe to the ſympathy and conſolation of their fellow-creatures. But we are encouraged to approach God in full confidence that he will receive us graciouſly,

and

and heal our ſorrows. He giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not: he dwelleth with the man of a humble and contrite ſpirit.

Again, the pride of our hearts, which affects more to appear than to be happy, makes us aſhamed to acknowledge our inferiority to creatures who ſtand originally upon the ſame level with ourſelves. But before the immenſity of the Deity, all compariſon is at an end, we ſubſide into nothing; and it appears our higheſt honour, as well as advantage, to be admitted to bow down, and pour forth our hearts before him.

The divine goodneſs familiar and continually preſent to the mind, at laſt imparts ſomewhat of itſelf, and infuſes a ſweetneſs into the heart, which proves the ſureſt antidote againſt pride, rancour, envy, and every malevolent and diſquieting affection of mind.

Thus complacency and ſatisfaction adorn and gladden the countenance, whilſt it is raiſed to heaven in acts of devotion.

Beſides all this, devotion elevates the mind above the ſphere within which all the cauſes of uneaſineſs and anxiety are circumſcribed. As the clouds which paſs over our heads, obſtruct the chearing rays of light only to thoſe who are below them, and are themſelves illuminated by the reflected ſplendor of ſuperior regions; ſo the mind mounted upon the wings of devotion, ſoars above all the little cares and anxieties which haunt the priſon of this world,

and breathes enlarged and unmoleſted in the regions of liberty, peace, and aſſured joy.

Thus I might appeal to thoſe who have been ſo happy as to make the experiment, if upon the firſt attack of ſorrow;—if when they found themſelves ready to ſink into perplexity and deſponding thoughts, upon occaſion of diſappointment, or uncommon ill uſage from their fellow-creatures; if in ſuch a ſituation they have poured forth their ſouls to God, reſigning themſelves entirely to his goodneſs, have they not found immediate relief? have they not found a ſerenity, which undiſturbed proſperity cannot comprehend? It was the divine goodneſs, not ſpeculatively contemplated, but poured down, and feelingly impreſſed upon their hearts. It was as if a voice from heaven, in loud and raviſhing accents, had announced the eſtabliſhment and everlaſting reign of peace and felicity in their hearts. And, now exalted upon an eminence from whence inferior objects appear diminiſhed and remote, the army of miſeries which lately appeared ſo vaſt and ſo formidable, hardly falls under the notice of the eye.

To confirm theſe obſervations I ſhall juſt obſerve, that as, in the diſeaſes of the body, nature herſelf often ſuggeſts the method of relief; ſo, no leſs benevolent in what is more important to our happineſs, by a ſort of inſtinctive impulſe, ſhe directs us to the moſt immediate and ſucceſsful conſolation under the more grievous miſeries of the mind. Thus the

heart

heart labouring with ſorrow too big to be uttered, and driven from every expectation and gleam of hope from human aid, without forethought or deliberation flies to the original fountain of all conſolation and happineſs.

The unnatural violence of men to themſelves in endeavouring to ſuppreſs or divert theſe feelings; their ſubſtituting falſe and artificial remedies; buſineſs, amuſements, I do not know what airy ſchemes of philoſophy, are the miſchievous cauſes which wreck their comfort, and plunge them into an unfathomable abyſs of miſery and deſpair.

SER-

SERMON VI.

Concerning the neceſſity of Death, and its no leſs neceſſary effects.

By THOMAS BLACKLOCK, D. D.

2 KINGS, xx. 1.

In thoſe days was Hezekiah ſick unto death: and the prophet Iſaiah the ſon of Amos came to him, and ſaid unto him, Thus ſaith the Lord, Set thine houſe in order, for thou ſhalt die, and not live.

IF mankind were ſo vain and fooliſh to flatter themſelves that the duration of their preſent ſtate would be eternal, Nature and Providence have taken ſuch care to undeceive them, as the importance of the point required. Scarce one day can paſs without exhibiting ſad ſpectacles of mortality to the public eye. As miſts and vapours, when exhaled, deſcend in rains; as fountains and rivers pour their full urns into the ocean, where they are undiſtinguiſhably loſt; as every morning-ſun riſes but to decline; by the ſame neceſſity, the ſame inviolable order of nature, every man is born to die. When the ſacred writings treat of human life, they conſider our exiſtence here, as an unſubſtantial vapour, (ſee Job xiv. 1. 2. and Pſal. ciii. 14.), which, floating through the boundleſs

boundleſs fields of air, is at laſt abſorbed in its maternal element, nor leaves the leaſt diſcernable veſtige behind. They conſider it as a flower in the field, which opening on the raviſhed eye, diſplays the faireſt colours of nature's inimitable pencil; but ſoon the nipping froſts, or chilling winds, blaſt all the grace and beauty of its blooming verdure, and only leave its melancholy ruins behind; that from theſe the contemplative gazer may, with deep-felt anxiety and tender regret, lament the beauteous wreck, whilſt he preſages his own. But Nature has not left us to learn our fate from remote and ambiguous c lls. How loud, how univerſal, how emphatic, how intelligible, how inceſſant, how alarming is her voice! It aſſumes every form that may engage our attention, it darts upon the ſoul in every thought, it ſpeaks in every period, it addreſſes every ſenſe. It is felt in the ties of friendſhip and conſanguinity when broken, it is ſeen in the widow's tears, and heard in the ſhrieks of orphans. The tomb, the inſatiable tomb, is ever open to devour its prey, whilſt multitudes of every ſex and age, from every clime, are conſtantly repleniſhing the dark and ſilent domains of death.

Is it not ſtrange, therefore, is it not unaccountably ſtrange, that Providence, and its ſubſtitute Nature, ſhould have taken all theſe pains to little or no purpoſe? When the funeral of an indifferent perſon paſſes by, we are contented to breathe a ſigh, which decency, not humanity,

manity, prompted, or to ſay we are ſorry for it, even with too little concern to ſave our veracity from imputation. But though our excuſe, that we have no connection with the perſon, might be ſuſtained; yet what can we plead when the grim tyrant is more awful and immediate in his approaches? Our neighbours, our friends, our relations have died: what then? Perhaps we dreſſed in black, paid a few tears to their memory, reclined our heads, talked ſadly, and looked grave, till the period of decent mourning expired: then, equally forgetful of our loſs and of ourſelves, we returned in all our former gaiety to the ſcenes of pleaſure, or the reſorts of buſineſs. It is one of the moſt benignant inſtitutions in Nature's law, that time affords a balm for every wounded heart.

I reprove not the drooping head when raiſed from dejection, nor would cover the cheek of ſorrow with bluſhes when wiped from tears. Let us return to the pleaſures and employments of life with proper reliſh, but never live with ſo much eagerneſs and avidity, as to forget that others have died before us, and that we alſo muſt die. It was to rouſe us from indolence and ſecurity, to awake, if poſſible, a due ſenſe of our precarious ſituation, that this ſubject has been undertaken; let me therefore beg, that it may gain ſuch attention from my audience, as they would wiſh to have paid it in the hour of darkneſs and convulſive pangs; when time, and earth, and day, and pleaſure, fly from every ſenſe, and when nothing but a

boundleſs

boundleſs and uncertain eternity lies before them. Death, my brethren, however gloomy and terrific, is pregnant with intereſting conſiderations: for though we have not, like Hezekiah, received a particular meſſage from Heaven, to warn us of the impending criſis; yet, by the voice of nature and experience, which, though leſs immediate and ſenſible, is the voice of God himſelf, we are certainly informed that we ſhall die.

I do not pretend to exhauſt a ſubject ſo copious; permit me only to hint a few things which ſeem natively to ariſe from the words of our text. Without attending to the preceding narration, we ſhall briefly inſiſt upon the injunction itſelf, "Set thine houſe in order, for "thou ſhalt die, and not live."

It was delivered by an immediate and ſpecial commiſſion from the abſolute Sovereign of heaven and earth, to Hezekiah, when amidſt the triumphs of a late victory, and elated with a ſenſe of freedom from a formidable enemy: he was ſeized with a diſtemper, mortal in its own nature, had not its malignity been checked by that Almighty Being in whoſe hands are the iſſues of life and death.

But without taking the words as they ſtand in connection, they may be, with great propriety, conſidered as a general precept; and in this view they will become univerſally applicable.

Let me, therefore, addreſs every particular perſon here; and would to God, my addreſs were

were armed with ſufficient energy, to prove effectual, whilſt in his name I call upon you to ſet your houſes in order, to regulate your moſt valuable and important affairs, for you ſhall die, and not live; you ſhall be torn from all the pleaſures, endearments, and advantages of your preſent ſtate; you ſhall be tranſported to ſcenes of immortal happineſs, or eternal anguiſh, as your own particular diſpoſitions and behaviour, the immutable diſtinction between virtue and vice, and the declared rules of God's eternal government, point out your way.

Firſt, then, we may conſider death as certain in its arrival, but uncertain in its period.

2*dly*, We may view it as a migration or removal from our preſent ſtate.

3*dly*, We may contemplate it, in its effects, both on our ſouls and bodies. And,

4*thly*, Deduce a few improvements from the whole.

I. We return to the firſt thing propoſed.

Every one upon reflection muſt be convinced, that he is not exempted from the common lot of mortality; that all the ſucceſſions of human race, from its origin to the preſent period, have paid the irredeemable debt of nature; and that he himſelf muſt viſit the undiſcovered country, from whoſe confines no traveller returns. But the great misfortune is this, that, infatuated by our fondneſs for the world, preſuming on the ſoundneſs of our conſtitutions, or terrified with the thoughts of approaching

diſſolution, we are willing to place the gloomy proſpect as remote as poſſible, and flatter ourſelves, that we may reach the moſt diſtant extreme which is aſſigned for the duration of human life. There appears no natural inconſiſtency in the ſuppoſition, and in this, as in many other caſes, we are too apt to heighten poſſibility into truth. But how vain our perſuaſion, obſervation and experience ought to convince us. How many infant ſtrangers are only deſtined to behold the light of heaven, and ſhut their eyes for ever? how many forſake the preſent ſcene before they reach the prime of life? how many have we beheld keen in the proſecution of buſineſs, or purſuit of pleaſure, who in the very tumult and ardour of action, were for ever arreſted by the leaden hand of death, and loſt to all our future inquiry? Nor are theſe inſtances, however numerous and ſtriking, the only ſources whence reaſon may deduce the uncertainty of life. Ten thouſand avenues to fate are ever open, even in the common courſe of things. We need not have recourſe to wars, to plagues, inundations, or earthquakes; the quiver of Death is always pregnant with ſhafts, equally certain in their flight, and proper to execute their Maſter's will.

In a frame ſo complex as the human body, where ſo many cauſes eſſential to life, concur in its preſervation, whence can we derive the preſumption that we ſhall continue long here? Are we not conſcious, that a ſtate which de-

pends on a right mixture and due proportion of humours, or a proper contexture of veins and fibres, muſt be precarious? Do we not know, that every material frame muſt at laſt wear out? Are we not ſenſible, that our ſpirits muſt be evaporated, or our ſolids oſſified, and that the very action of digeſtion and circulation muſt at laſt deſtroy the organs which are exerted? Is it not plain, that all the qualities even of the food by which we are nouriſhed, are far from being equally friendly to nature? and though the ſtrength of our frame may for ſome time conquer the malignity of ſuch as are contrary; yet, as accident, or old age, renders us more feeble, they will operate with increaſing force. But though the human body ſhould be granted ſecure from all internal danger, yet how is it proof againſt the extremes of weather, and the various tumults of theſe hoſtile elements which we inhabit? Every different temperature of heat or cold, every breath of putred air, every ſtorm that blows, may have fatal effects on the human conſtitution.

After this account of our ſituation, is it ſtill neceſſary that we ſhould call forth the dreadful retinue of Death, and bring thoſe relentleſs miniſters which more immediately attend his perſon, to your view? Muſt we exhibit Conſumption, pale, and ſtruggling for breath; or Fevers, which, in their delirious rage, war againſt Nature, till ſhe is exhauſted in the combat? Muſt we introduce the frightful family of Pain, the Gout, the Stone, the Colic, with

their

their diſtorted viſſages, convulſive attitudes, and piercing cries? Muſt we invoke the widowed wife, the deſerted huſband, the childleſs father, or the orphan child, that, in the anguiſh of nature, their tears and groans may atteſt the truths we declare?

Is it not ſufficient to rouſe our attention, when we reflect, that the preſent indiviſible inſtant alone is our own? The rapidity of thought, the lightning of heaven, the ſwifteſt courſe of winged deſire impatient for its object, are not ſwifter than the approaches of our fate. Why then ſhould we linger with fond attachments, or unmanly terrors, on a foreign ſhore, whilſt the ſail that wafts us to our eternal home is already unfurled, and every wind, and every tide, calls us to prepare? But ſuppoſe the fate of things were different, ſuppoſe it were given us to protract life from day to day, even till the plaintive feeble trembling period of old age, would this be a juſt cauſe for delaying our preparation? Far from it.

When fancy and appetite have ranged at large, when they have acquired habits of licence and brutality, they will ſcorn the rein, and reject the ſalutary hand of diſcipline.

There are indeed certain appetites in our frame, which age and weakneſs muſt of courſe ſubdue; but if they are the conqueſt of nature, not of virtue, we are not one jot improved by their abſence. Theſe devils are only diſpoſſeſſed, that they may give place to legions worſe than themſelves. Fraud, the favourite

child of hell. Ambition, that firſt violated the ſacred harmony of God's creation; Avarice, that eternal thirſt, which is ſtill more inflamed by indulgence; and ſelf-devouring Envy, ſucceed to the paſſions of youth, and render the infirmities of age more inſupportable. Theſe continually increaſe in number and malignity. In ſpite of every ſubterfuge, Mortality aſſerts her univerſal empire; nor can all the magic of ſelf-deceiving Hope, diſguiſe our ſituation from us, nor turn our attention from the impending change. Then it is that Death, in all his horrors, riſes to our view: pale and ghaſtly, he ſtalks for ever before us, and brandiſhes at every ſtep his mortal dart nearer to our boſoms. Is this a time for recollection, and deliberate thought; is this a proper ſeaſon for moral culture and refinement, whilſt, diſtracted with external pain and inward diſſipation, when the memory of our criminal pleaſures which are paſt, haunts us aſſiduouſly, as ghoſts purſue their murderer, to tell the melancholy tidings, that they can be enjoyed no more? when the curtain of eternal Night is drawn aſide, and Death and Hell ſeem oſtentatious of their latent horrors? Let us take a more minute and particular view of a perſon in this ſituation, let our eyes dwell for ſome time on his miſerable portraiture. See, he endeavours to walk in vain; his paralytic limbs refuſe their office: he courts repoſe, and reclines upon his couch; but thorns and ſerpents are ſtrawed over the bed of reſt. Vital warmth forſakes him, pain purſues,

ſues departing life through every retreat, and no place affords him eaſe. Lo! he ſtarts, he ſmites his breaſt, he lifts his eyes to heaven, then fixes them with terror on the ground. Ah me! cries he in tears, what am I become? Is it in myſelf, or the world around me, that I feel this inexplicable alteration? Where is that warm blood, thoſe volatile ſpirits, which danced ſo gayly through my veins? Why have my nerves loſt their wonted vigour and elaſticity? why do they ſhrink and tremble even in the common offices of life and nature? What has ſo dreadfully changed the appearance of things? why does the midnight-frolick, which once I enjoyed with ſuch intenſe delight, now ſeem no more than inſipid noiſe and diſſipation?

What flattens the reliſh of wine, obſcures the luſtre of beauty, extinguiſhes the taſte of pleaſure, and palls the charms of ſocial riot? What has eclipſed the glories of power and poſſeſſion? why do they no longer fill my heart with tranſport, and rouſe my frozen powers to action! Alas! theſe enjoyments and purſuits are now no more. Yet even this ſtate of languor and inſipidity would be tolerable; even the efforts of external pain, which, like a relentleſs fury, tears my nerves, breaks my bones, and drinks my blood, might be born: but where, oh! where is my reputation? where the aſſiſtance and comfort of my ſympathiſing friends? where the pleaſing recollection of a well-ſpent life? where the ineſtimable enjoyments of a ſelf-approving heart? and, O my ſoul, where

are thy hopes of eternal happineſs? Wretch that I am! every debilitated power, every tormented ſenſe in my frame, recals to my mind ſome criminal indulgence. I have no uſe of memory, but as a record of my own profligacy and infamy. My heart is the object of its own ultimate deteſtation. My conſcience upbraids me with unceaſing reproaches, and every part of this diſordered body tells me, in a language too ſenſible to be doubted, that I muſt die. Muſt die! O heaven and earth, and what ſucceeds? Horror, anguiſh, deſpair! the bitter cup of everlaſting damnation! To what reſource can I then fly? Though God himſelf ſhould remit his vengeance, and quench thoſe corroſive fires that for ever encompaſs my ſoul, and pierce her inmoſt eſſence; yet hell is in my own boſom, it is inſeparable from myſelf, and admits of no cure but annihilation. Will my tears quench the unextinguiſhable flame? will my groans ſoften to tenderneſs thoſe malignant ſpirits, who extort eternal trophies from my torment, who endeavour to make infinite juſtice recoil upon itſelf, and to wound the Creator by the miſery of his productions? Such is the picture of a guilty life prolonged to age; and for its fidelity, I dare, without heſitation, appeal to nature and experience. Is it wiſe then, is it ſafe, is it prudent, to delay the important taſk of preparation, till nature ſinks unequal to the toil? Is it conſiſtent with our pretences to reaſon, only to begin

gin the moſt valuable ſcience of life when we muſt ceaſe to live?

II. But this leads us to conſider death as a migration, or removal from this world.

It is our principal intention in theſe reflections to conſider the nature of life and death, that we may form a proper eſtimate of each, and be able to judge what may be loſt or gained by either alternative.

But ſince death is the neceſſary and unavoidable event of all, and ſince the time of nature's demand is uncertain, it becomes every rational being to ſtand prepared, either for keeping or leaving his poſt according as the univerſal Sovereign ſhall direct him: for as no orders can be more ſolemn and obligatory than the commands of God and nature; if we would obey them, our obedience muſt be free and chearful, without reluctance, ſtruggle, or regret. It has, however, been obſerved, that one chief end which we have at preſent in view, is to form a proper eſtimate of our change: now, that this may be done with due accuracy, it will doubtleſs appear juſt to conſider what we muſt relinquiſh in our departure from life.

And in the firſt place, we muſt neceſſarily quit every perſonal advantage. The man who glories in corporeal ſtrength, muſt acknowledge Fate his ſuperior, and ſink beneath its oppreſſive hand, with groans and agonizing convulſions. At the approach of Death, the ſpark-

ling

ling eye, whoſe luſtre pierceth the ſoul of every beholder, ſhall be extinct; and the vermilion cheeks, though tinged with Beauty's faireſt bloom, grow pale as flowers when prematurely nipt by froſt. Yet a little while, and the talleſt head, the moſt majeſtic form, that ever nature reared, or animated, ſhall be low, and mingle with its native duſt. Yet a little while, and the brighteſt genius that ever was kindled by the breath of heaven, ſhall be intercepted in its grand deſigns, and bid a laſt adieu to every mortal connection. Yet a little while, and the boſom which beats high with florid wiſhes, and ſanguine expectations, ſhall be more cold, more inſenſible, than ice. Haſt thou, O ſon of Earth, acquired extenſive or valuable poſſeſſions in this world? Did thy ſoul fondly tell herſelf ſhe had enough, and prepared to riot on the fruits of her care and labour? Look forward, and behold the unexpected deſtiny which awaits thee. In vain haſt thou accumulated all this vaſt treaſure; in vain is it ſecured to thee by all the forms of law, and every human precaution, what have human laws and human precautions to do with the awards of Fate? Thy doom is ratified in heaven; and if thou art not willingly obſequious to its commands, a power more mighty and more irreſiſtible than thine ſhall compel thee. But perhaps my ſuſpicions are uncharitable; perhaps thou mayeſt reſign, with chearfulneſs and magnanimity, all thoſe pleaſures and accommodations which accrue from beauty, ſtrength, or

riches:

riches: yet there are other connections of a nature more tender and ſenſible, which ſtill retard thy flight, and by the deareſt, ſtrongeſt, and moſt inſeparable attraction, detain thy heart with all its wiſhes in this mutable and tranſitory world. Thou haſt often ſeen the faireſt form decay, and the moſt extenſive property tranſferred to other poſſeſſors; it was natural for thee to think thy beauty not immortal, nor thy rights unalienable: but did thy heart obſerve the ſame precaution in its excurſions after ambition, or in the vigour of its enterprifes for fame? Art thou contented to be ſtript of titles, power, and pageantry? Can thy deſires contract themſelves to a dark and narrow cell? Art thou reconciled to that ſilence and oblivion, which muſt ere long involve thy memory? Even here thy heart may prove victorious, and riſe ſuperior to theſe attachments; but what of the endearments of kindred and friendſhip? Beauty is fading, and admiration precarious; ſtrength muſt wreſtle with a ſtronger power, and be ſubdued; riches make to themſelves wings, and flee away; fame is like muſic to the deaf, never obtained till it cannot be heard; ambition ſoars above its proper height, and by its towering, aggravates its fall. But, gracious God! muſt we bid adieu, an everlaſting adieu, to our deareſt friends, to thoſe whom ſimilar ſentiments, and long intercourſe, have rendered a part, an intimate and ſenſible part of ourſelves? Muſt this harmonious union of hearts be violated by the inexorable

orable hand of Death? Muſt every ſacred ſympathy of ſoul be felt no more? Muſt the ſmile that cheared, the hand that aſſiſted, the wiſdom and tenderneſs which directed us in every viciſſitude of life, be reſigned for ever? Muſt we bid an endleſs farewell to a worthy father, an indulgent mother, and every tender domeſtic relative? Our wives and children too! Soul-piercing thought! muſt we abandon them to the cold and parſimonious entertainment which widows and orphans too frequently find? Defenceleſs, helpleſs, as they are, how ſoon may they fall the unreſiſting ſacrifice of oppreſſive violence? Innocent and unſuſpecting, how ſoon may they become a prey to the ſnares and arts of a mercenary, deſigning, and inſidious world? Theſe are too frequently the diſmal retroſpects of a deathbed; and there are few of mankind who muſt not expect to loſe ſome or all of theſe advantages in their tranſition from life. It is, therefore, of infinite importance to our tranquillity in this world, and our happineſs in the next, that we anticipate our future change, with all its conſequences; ſince this is the only way by which they can poſſibly be conſoled or redreſſed. But of this more in our improvement.

SER-

SERMON VII.

The Subject continued.

2 KINGS, XX. 1.

In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death: and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amos came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.

III. WE should now proceed to contemplate Death in its most immediate and remarkable effects both on our souls and bodies; but whilst formerly we recapitulated the various accommodations and pleasures which must be resigned in our exit from the present state, this enumeration insensibly led us to anticipate many of these effects: yet there are still some which have not fallen under our observation; and which, by the grace of God, may dispose us to entertain the prospect of Death with a solemnity becoming its importance. How decent, how lovely, how awful, how admirable, is this living structure man! how erect his stature! how majestic his deportment! how nice and delicate his symmetry! how noble and expressive his countenance! how various, and how properly adapted his powers! how numerous and astonishing his functions! how sublime and energetic his appearance

pearance in action! Such a fabric the preſent moment offers to our view; but to-morrow—great and unſearchable God! how dreadful, how inconceivable is the change! Inſtead of that grace and variety of motion which we formerly beheld and admired, his whole frame is now chained in abſolute and perpetual inactivity. Inſtead of that erect form, that majeſtic and ſignificant deportment, which lately charmed us, we now view him extended in the ſame diſmal attitude for ever. Inſtead of that vital and agreeable warmth formerly diffuſed over his whole frame, eſſential frigidity itſelf, is not more cold than all his limbs, ſo that every touch thrills the ſoul with ineffable horror. Inſtead of thoſe beautiful colours, that exquiſite proportion, that inimitable expreſſion, which once adorned his countenance, his eyes are fixed, and all their living fire extinct; his lips and cheeks are covered with one uniform paleneſs, his features are become long, ſharp, and ghaſtly. Here let the ſelf-enamoured beauty, the darling idol of fame, the titled pageant of heraldry, the ſplendid minion of fortune, retire from the gilded equipage or luxurious table, and ſurvey the genuine image of their intrinſic greatneſs.

I will not protract this ſad deſcription, nor attend the mournful object in its progreſs to its native duſt. Were I diſpoſed to indulge a humour of unneceſſary declamation, I might pierce the funereal gloom, and delineate the human form in all the periods of its decay. But

let others traverſe the dark and noiſome vault where mortality dwells in the pomp of ruin; let others contract the brow of Death in adventitious frowns, and cloud his aſpect with horrors not his own. I can ſee no good effect to be produced by awaking and exaggerating the prejudices of ſenſe and fancy. To expoſe Nature in her diſhabille, and detect her retired operations, may indeed agitate the weak or ſuperſtitious heart with ineffectual panics; but to a philoſophical eye, all the forms which Nature wears, and all the impreſſions of her hand, are equally venerable; nor does pure and unde-praved Reaſon admire her leſs in the proceſs of her works to diſſolution, than when her generative and prolific influence is exerted, to build once more the falling forms, and repleniſh the ſurface of the globe. Let it, however, mortify the vain ebullitions of human pride, (and what can humble us if ſuch meditations will not?) that man may ſay with propriety to the worm, "Thou art my ſiſter; and to corruption, Thou "art my father, and my mother." Here then let the curtain fall; the tragedy of man, at leaſt in this view, has now reached its final cataſtrophe. But there is another proſpect not leſs affecting to a ſenſible heart, than thoſe which have already engaged us. It is not ſufficient, that form and motion become the trophies of our mercileſs conqueror. At his approach the flame of life goes out, and all the powers of ſenſation are no more. Truly light is ſweet, and it is a delightful thing to behold

the ſun: how fair, how enchantingly fair, is the face of Nature, diverſified with flowery vales, wood-crown'd mountains, and cryſtal rivers! How ſweetly breathes the vernal gale, tinged with a mingled fragrance of ten thouſand odours! How harmonious and raviſhing the ſound of muſic! But, O! farewell ye momentary beauties, henceforth ye exiſt for other ſenſes, not for ours. The deciſive inſtant of agony and tears approaches; our part on this temporary theatre is finiſhed, and we muſt give place to others, who already wait our abſence to appear.

Well and wiſely did the Pſalmiſt caution us, not to repoſe our confidence in princes, nor the ſons of men, whoſe breath departs, whoſe mortal connections and enterpriſes are in a moment effaced, and conſigned to endleſs forgetfulneſs. But amidſt this awful revolution, whilſt the moving and ſenſible frame which connects us with ſurrounding objects, is diveſted of its priſtine dignity, and mixes with the inanimated earth from whence it roſe, what is the fate of that unwearied energy within us, that principle which feels, reflects, determines? Is the ſoul, that emanation of divinity, that ſpark of celeſtial intelligence, which God himſelf firſt breathed into the human frame, ſubjected to the ſame diſſolution with its material reſidence? If ſo, why, (except in ſome particular diſeaſes), why ſhould it retain the full poſſeſſion of its powers, and independence of its nature, even to the laſt palpitation of the heart

and

and pulſes? nay, why does it riſe above pain and weakneſs? why does it derive perfection and improvement, not only from the infirmities and ruin of its own body, but from the final wreck and diſſipation of all that is mortal? Long before the preſent criſis, it beheld that material ſyſtem to which it was united, in its growth, in its maturity, and in its decline, whilſt the conſcious and informing principle felt itſelf always progreſſive; and through every corporeal change recogniſed the growing vigour, extent, and perfection of its indefatigable powers. Surely, therefore, a difference ſo immenſe and ſtriking, muſt merit our ſerious attention: and what can we conclude from it, but that there is a ſpirit in man, and the inſpiration of the Almighty? The body dies, life and vegetation forſake it; but theſe are, for ever inherent in the ſoul, unterminated in their views, and inceſſant in their operations. Lo! the ſcene of immortality opens, the dawn of everlaſting day pours its chearful beams upon the intellectual eye. Nor is this proſpect alone derived from the intrinſic nature of the ſoul; the various diſpoſitions of external things are no leſs eloquent of her eternity. The unequal and unaccountable diſtributions of good and evil, which every obſerver of nature and providence muſt perceive, plainly prove, that in the mild and equitable government of God, there muſt be a period, a glorious and diſtinguiſhed period, when virtue and happineſs, vice and miſery, ſhall be ſtrictly and inviolably united.

Is this then the ſtate of things; is the preſent period of our nature, a period of geſtation only? Are our immortal ſpirits now no more than in embryo? and is death in effect nothing elſe but a birth to everlaſting exiſtence? Are we likewiſe informed by the voice of Nature, and the word of God, that this eternal ſtate ſhall be agreeable or diſagreeable, according to the habits, actions, and diſpoſitions, which diverſify the human character? Shall virtue then be enthroned in the preſence of God, and partake all that felicity which the capacities of an intelligent nature can admit, or the infinite joys of heaven inſpire? Shall the vicious mind be depreſſed as low as hell? Shall innate plagues for ever prey upon its immortal faculties? Shall it feel the preſence of God only by his vindictive power? Shall the horrors of deſpair eternally blacken over its head? and, deep already, ſhall it for ever ſink to deeper damnation? How then ſhould theſe awful and important convictions operate on the conduct of a rational and immortal being.——Thus we are inſenſibly led to deduce a few of the moſt obvious improvements from what has been ſaid.

IV. It appears, then, that death is the neceſſary and unavoidable iſſue of our preſent ſtate; that no period of life is ſecure from its attacks; that it deprives us of every corporeal advantage or connection; and that it opens a paſſage to conſummate felicity or unutterable anguiſh, according to our behaviour in this world.

From

From theſe four principal ſources, numberleſs improvements may be drawn. We ſhall only chuſe ſuch as moſt naturally occur, and promiſe the greateſt utility. Is it then certain beyond all heſitation, that we muſt die? If ſo, what is more plain and natural, than to regulate our conduct and affairs by this proſpect? Such was the Prophet's meſſage to Hezekiah in the text, "Set thine houſe in order, for "thou ſhalt die, and not live." If literally tranſlated, it is, "Command, or give orders to "thy houſe." A late author * has been at great pains to prove, that all the ſanctions of the Jewiſh diſpenſation were temporary, and that the immortality of the ſoul lay hid in the ſecret counſels of God, from whence nothing tranſpired concerning it till the publication of Chriſtianity: but whoever reads the Old Teſtament with due attention, will clearly diſcern, that immortality, though more obſcurely and reſervedly mentioned, is yet neceſſarily implied in a great many paſſages, as in that to which our Saviour alludes in his anſwer to the Sadducees †; and that the interpretations which this ingenious writer would obtrude upon us, are forced and unnatural. This, therefore, being granted, it muſt follow, that by the regulation of Hezekiah's houſe, the prophet did not confine himſelf to the arrangement of his ſecular affairs. He not only enjoins him to adjuſt the property of his private effects, and appoint a ſucceſſor in his government; but the precept

* See Warburton's Divine Legation of Moſes.

† Matth. xxii. 32.

extends to eternity, and its concerns. The former view is not to be neglected, but the latter ought chiefly to engage us. It is certainly incumbent on every man, before his departure from this world, to diſpoſe of his perſonal effects, as equity, neceſſity, gratitude, or other natural obligations ſhall determine; and to prevent all animoſity or diſpute, by adjuſting the claims of his friends. This rule invariably obſerved, might greatly ſuſpend, if not entirely prevent, that cruel and unnatural eagerneſs which heirs diſcover in crouding to the chambers of their expiring relations, even before the corpſe be cold; not to give way to the natural emotions of humanity and regret, not to mourn the deceaſed, but to carve and dilacerate his property. One cannot mention this diſagreeable circumſtance, without bluſhes and indignation. It is indeed ſufficient to make any liberal and ingenuous mind aſhamed of human nature. But whilſt we deteſt the crime, we muſt acknowledge the fact. We muſt acknowledge, that widows and orphans have often been defrauded by the rapacity of villanous pretenders, whoſe title could only be founded on the negligence of the original proprietor. It muſt be owned, that the moſt ſacred obligations which nature, reaſon, or ſociety, could ſanctify, have been cruelly and ſacrilegiouſly profaned in controverted ſettlements, by that implacable rage and bitterneſs which a tedious and uncertain trial at law never fails to create and inflame, whilſt the value of the ſubject

in

in queſtion, is frequently exhauſted in the expences of the ſuit.

To remove or qualify theſe inconveniencies, it is extremely proper, that every man who leaves effects behind him, ſhould declare how their future property ought to be aſcertained, and ratify that declaration with every neceſſary and uſeful form which particular ſocieties have appointed for that purpoſe. But if theſe precautions are neceſſary in our external circumſtances, how much more care and circumſpection are due to our minds, which conſtitute our real ſelves, and whoſe intereſts are infinitely more extenſive and permanent than all ſublunary concerns taken together? Muſt I then die? Conſider, O my ſoul, what is the import of this irrepealable and univerſal law. Detatch thyſelf and all thy wiſhes from every mortal engagement. Art thou a rational creature, and conſcious of this awful revolution? Tell me, in the name of reaſon, in the name of experience, in the name of God himſelf, why murmur at thy deſtiny? To what purpoſe linger and look behind thee? Why ſhamefully diſcover thy impotence, by ſtruggling for life, and graſping at every ſlender twig, to ſave thee from the inevitable precipice? The neceſſity in which thou art involved, is determined, and irreverſible but by the command of God; and what claim haſt thou to a diſpenſation from the univerſal lot of thy nature? Shall the Creator and Governor of things, ſuperſede the wiſe and uninterrupted plan of this providence in

in partiality to thee? Advance then, but advance with that grace and decorum which become thy rational and immortal nature. Be not dragged like a ſordid wretch, a baſe and cowardly malefactor, to that conſpicuous ſcene where thou mayſt appear as a candidate for endleſs glory and felicity. Nor is it enough to be impreſſed with the general conviction of dying; for what is poſſible in any diſtant period, is now, even now equally poſſible. Haſt thou ſeen ſuch numberleſs, ſuch fatal inſtances of the uncertainty of life, and canſt thou reſt ſupine and regardleſs of thy own? Wilt thou begin thy preparations to-morrow? What and where is to-morrow? It is in the records of eternity alone; to-morrow's ſun may riſe, but not for thee. Perhaps theſe ſhades which at preſent thicken over the face of nature, may wrap thee in everlaſting night. Delay not then: the prize is eternal and infinite; the time aſſigned for action, a moment only. Doſt thou tremble at the pain of dying? It is a pain common to all ſenſitive natures, and conſequently not intolerable to thine. Be comforted: if death is deliberate and tardy in his approach, the conflict will be eaſy and ſupportable. If he ruſhes upon thee with violence and impetuoſity, he cannot at once urge the blow and continue the ſmart; for no torment can be both exquiſite and durable. Art thou ſorry to be arreſted in the prime of life? thy grief is equally fruitleſs and unjuſt. Why wouldſt thou languiſh beneath a load of mortality?

tality? why wouldſt thou groan and pant under this terreſtrial burden, even till the laſt moment of its poſſible duration? Then come the hours of diſguſt, peeviſhneſs, and imbecility; then deſire retains its former keenneſs, whilſt every capacity of enjoyment is either greatly enfeebled, or abſolutely loſt. Would it not be much nobler, and more manly, to hear the call of nature with chearfulneſs, fortitude, and reſignation; to ſpring at once into the regions of immortal being, from whoſe remoteſt precincts, age and death, pain and ſorrow, are for ever baniſhed? But death is a terrible change. Doubtleſs; and pray, is life an eligible ſtate? Look back on what is already paſt; conſult your former experience; can you bear to reiterate the ſame dull meals, to revolve the ſame uneaſy dreams, to repeat the ſame unmeaning converſations, to tread the ſame beaten paths, to yawn in the ſame trite amuſements, to laugh at the ſame ſtale jeſt, to review the ſame unvaried proſpect; in ſhort, continually to wind the ſame uniform circle of pains and pleaſures? Curioſity ſickens, and cowardice itſelf nauſeates the view. Thou haſt already lived, and exhauſted the pleaſures of living. Reconcile thy vain fears and vainer hopes to the impending change: night is the natural end of day, repoſe of wearineſs, and death of life. How Nature intends that we ſhould rate a gift ſo fluctuating and periſhable, we may learn from the trivial caſualties by which it may be either protracted or curtailed.

But,

But, artful to project, and keen to inflict thy own unhappineſs, thou doſt not judge of the future by the paſt. New connections and ideal treaſures of chymerical delight, perpetually riſe to Fancy's view, and kindle deſires unfelt before. As fruits untaſted fix the wandering eye, but, when obtained, indulge the pallate with no higher variety, than the ſame ſweet, bitter, or acid, which it had formerly ſo often felt, and neglected. Let us examine things in detail. Wealth renders us more independent, and extends our capacities of doing good; but, in proportion to the quantity of our poſſeſſions, or the number of our retinue, we become the toys of fortune and the prey of knaves. Fame only renders us a more conſpicuous mark for the envenomed ſhafts of envy and detraction. Power is precarious and dangerous, it is a ſerpent which eſcapes our graſp only to murder us with its ſting. Youth is indefatigable in its ſtrength, aſpiring in its aims, ardent in its wiſhes, keen in its ſenſations; but the natural conſequences of this character are precipitation, guilt, and remorſe. Social life may, perhaps, wear a fairer face. Let us view it with impartiality and deliberation. Haſt thou obſerved man invariably juſt, beneficent, and hoſpitable to man? Are the compliments and civilities of converſation to be interpreted in their full extent? Is there no rivalry, no competition of intereſts in human commerce? Are virtue and merit the only paths which lead to office and diſtinction? Haſt

thou

thou always ſeen a ſpirit of conſanguineal tenderneſs univerſally cultivated, or the relative duties of life ſcrupulouſly performed? Have friends and relations been for ever united in the ſame views, intereſts, and inclinations? Is the courſe of public affairs conducted by unerring reaſon, or animated by generous and diſintereſted aims? Let me not exaggerate the evils of ſocial intercourſe, but appeal to thy own memory and obſervation. Only impreſs this caution deep on thy ſoul: "Never hope to "ſhare enjoyments which thou haſt not be-"held;" nor imagine thy lot will be free from thoſe inconveniencies which naturally and generally attend the ſame circumſtances. Such a dream would be too preſumptuous for Folly herſelf, even in the moſt ſanguine tranſports of her levity. Reduce things to their proper colours, and their proper magnitude: let not fancy behold any object, but through the medium of reaſon and experience.——But thou art ſhock'd at the ſtate of thy body after death. The notions of coldneſs, inſenſibility, and putrefaction, haunt thee. Once more be diſabuſed: Death is not the abſence of ſenſation perceived; for that very feeling would be a ſenſation. It is a total requieſcence; a long profound and undiſturbed repoſe; a gracious manumiſſion from chaſtiſement and bondage; a ſabbath of ſacred tranquillity for weary and afflicted Nature. He who is dead, ſo far as the body is concerned, may be juſtly compared to him who never had exiſtence; and if thou

canſt

canſt recollect no feelings of pain or miſery prior to thy birth, neither haſt thou the ſmalleſt cauſe to fear them in the grave. What are all the changes which affect thy material vehicle to thee? No more than thoſe which influence any other piece of earth. It is no longer a part of thyſelf: the relation is broken, the union diſſolved. Let faith inform thee, that if thou liveſt agreeably to thy Creator's will, "What was ſown in weakneſs, ſhall be "raiſed in power; what was reſigned corrup-"tible, ſhall put on incorruption; what has "yielded to mortality, ſhall be reſtored im-"mortal."——But God is juſt, and thou art a ſinner. This indeed is a real cauſe of horror; yet let it not impel thee to deſpair. Thou knoweſt that Jeſus himſelf deſcended from heaven to aſſume our nature, to repreſent our perſons, to ſuffer for our iniquities, to intercede for our pardon, to become our equitable and ſympathiſing judge. Learn from his example, and from his precepts, to live and die; then ſhall thy life be ſweet ſerenity, and thy death everlaſting triumph. Receive him in all his characters and relations, cultivate habitual and delightful communion with him, be what he has preſcribed, and thou ſhalt certainly enjoy all that he has promiſed.

THESE are the ſentiments and impreſſions, which, through all ages, have ſupported the good and virtuous in every viciſſitude of life, and

and even in the awful criſis of their diſſolution.

In the firſt topic propoſed by our method, we have ſeen, with what ſoul-conſuming agonies, what keen anticipations of ineffable horror, the man of guilt and diſſipation expires. Inſtead of that dreadful object, (for an object more dreadful God's creation cannot preſent), let us now obſerve with what triumph and exultation the real Chriſtian, whoſe life has been uniformly devoted to the ſervice of God and man, reſigns his pure and immaculate ſpirit into the arms of its Creator. See on his countenance the ſmile of conſcious peace; behold his eye, though on the verge of abſolute extinction, yet relumed with happy preſages of that eternal and infinite joy into which his ſoul muſt immediately enter. Liſten to his feeble, yet animated accents, how much they breathe of heaven, how nearly they reſemble the voice of angels: Weep not for me, he cries, my dear deploring friends; weep not for me: the living, not the dead, demand your tears. Alas! how much has the newborn infant to ſuffer from the accidents of nature; from the caprice and cruelty of fortune; from the indifference, contumely, or treachery of his ſpecies; from the loſs of thoſe who have been long endeared by choice or nature, and from the ſad and mortifying review of his own guilt and errors. Gracious God! what numberleſs acknowledgements, what eternal and infinite gratitude are due to

thee, for having conducted me in this manner through the tempeſts of a tumultuous and fluctuating life, to the harbour of everlaſting tranquillity and happineſs! With what inexpreſſible tranſport, amidſt the debility of nature, the ſtruggles of departing life, do I contemplate my approach to that immortal glory and felicity which was the beneficent deſtination of my being; to theſe refined and inconceivable enjoyments, which eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor hath the capacious ſoul of man, even in its utmoſt exertion, been able to comprehend! O Sovereign mercy! O redeeming love! how boundleſs, how inexhauſtible, how ineſtimable the treaſures of ſupreme and eternal beatitude, which you have prepared and accumulated for thoſe whoſe lives have been one effort of love and obedience to God, or of juſtice and benevolence to man! The ſands that conſtitute the ſhore; the drops that form the profound and expanſive ocean; the rays of light, which, from her earlieſt birth, have inveſted Nature with a robe of effulgence,—may be numbered: but who ſhall eſtimate the quantity or duration of thoſe intenſe and inceſſant delights, which for ever flow from thee, O eternal ſource of being and enjoyment! whoſe propitiated countenance I ſhall ſoon behold, to be eclipſed or intercepted no more. There too ſhall I recogniſe the friends of my boſom, whoſe depature from life I have ſo long ſurvived and lamented. They did not finally periſh, but were reſumed by the Friend and Father of

the

the univerſe, for ever to worſhip in his temple above. There ſhall I behold in their native ſplendour, the original forms of beauty, truth, and good, inſeparably united in the boſom of their parent. Weep not for me, my friends, but congratulate, if you do not envy, my approaching felicity. Farewell; we part but for a moment, to reſume and enjoy an eternal and uninterrupted intercourſe. Farewell, ye radiant luminaries of heaven; farewell earth, with all thy variegated proſpects; farewell every ſublunary object. Hail paradiſe! Hail ye cherubim and ſeraphim! Hail ye ſpirits of juſt men made perfect! How ſublime, how delightful your intercourſe! Welcome to my ſoul, O my Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. When the preſent forms of creation ſhall vaniſh, when a new nature ſhall emerge, when other planets circling other ſuns, ſhall in their glorious revolutions, have meaſured numberleſs ſucceſſions of ages; ſtill ſhall the joys of heaven be new to my ſoul; ſtill ſhall they be as far from end or interruption, as at the moment when they firſt began.

SERMON VIII.

The temper, character, and duty, of a Miniſter of the Goſpel.

By WILLIAM LEECHMAN, D. D.

1 TIM. iv. 16.

Take heed unto thyſelf, and unto thy doctrine; and continue in them: for in doing this, thou ſhalt both ſave thyſelf, and them that hear thee.

Preached before the ſynod of Glaſgow and Ayr, at Glaſgow, April 7. 1741.

THE wiſer and more conſiderate part of mankind, generally complain of the unſucceſsfulneſs of the goſpel, and the low ſtate of religion, notwithſtanding the public eſtabliſhments for religious inſtruction. It muſt be acknowledged, that there is but too much reaſon for the complaint. But on whom muſt the blame be laid? on the obſtinate folly and depravity of the hearers? or on the ignorance, careleſſneſs, and worldly lives, of us the teachers? 'Tis in vain either to deny or diſſemble the matter; a great ſhare of the blame may juſtly be charged on ourſelves. It certainly then concerns us, greatly concerns us, as we are the eſtabliſhed inſtructors of the reſt of mankind, "to keep ourſelves pure from the blood of all "men,"

"men," by hearkening to this important admonition of the Apoſtle in the words of the text, to *take heed unto ourſelves, and unto our doctrine; to continue in them: for in doing this, we ſhall both ſave ourſelves, and them that hear us.*

In diſcourſing on this ſubject, it is hoped, it may not be improper, nor unſuitable to the preſent occaſion, to endeavour, by the divine aſſiſtance, in the *firſt* place, To explain and illuſtrate theſe great rules of the Apoſtle, in the ſame order in which they lie in the text;—and then, *ſecondly*, To conſider the motives by which the obſervation of them is enforced: *For in doing this, thou ſhalt both ſave thyſelf, and them that hear thee.*

Firſt, THE Rule, *Take head to thyſelf.*

I. THE meaning of this precept, in the loweſt ſenſe of it, is, that thoſe who pretend to be the inſtructors and guides of the reſt of mankind, ſhould take care that their own behaviour be blameleſs and inoffenſive, 1 Tim. iii. 2. "A "biſhop muſt be blameleſs." We know the world expects an high pitch of purity from us, and examines our conduct with great ſeverity; therefore we ought to watch over it with equal ſeverity ourſelves: and that we may in ſome meaſure anſwer the expectations of the world, let us abſtain not only from all evil, but from all appearance of it too; not venturing ſo much as to approach near the boundary that ſeparates virtue and vice; but in all caſes where there can be any diſpute about the preciſe point

where the laudable part ends, and the blameable begins, let us take care to keep ourſelves, viſibly, and to the conviction of all ſpectators, on the ſafe ſide of the diſputed limit. If we keep invariably by this rule, we ſhall be ſo far from offending againſt temperance, that we ſhall be exemplary in it; ſo far from violating juſtice, and doing things hard and rigorous, that we ſhall be ready to yield ſomething even of our undoubted right; ſo far from being guilty of any indecency in behaviour or diſcourſe, that we ſhall keep at a diſtance from every thing liable to the ſuſpicion of it; and ſo far from expoſing ourſelves by a levity of carriage unbecoming our function, that we ſhall rather lean to the ſafer extreme of gravity and reſerve. Nay it may be neceſſary ſometimes that we abſtain from things perfectly indifferent in their own nature, when doing otherwiſe would offend our weaker Chriſtian brethren, deſtroy our influence, or leſſen our power of doing good.

Further, that our conduct may be unexceptionable, we muſt take heed to what is ſaid or done in our preſence, ſo as never to ſuffer ourſelves to be carried away by a falſe modeſty, or a vicious complaiſance, to approve, or ſeem to approve, of what is baſe and unworthy, even in the company of thoſe who are undoubtedly our ſuperiors. While we ſhew all due regard to their ſtations and characters, it muſt appear at the ſame time, that we have a greater regard for truth, virtue, piety, and decency; while we a-

void

void every thing like inſolence and pertneſs, on the one hand, we muſt keep at the greateſt diſtance from flattery, and abject cringing, on the other. When any ſubject of diſcourſe is ſtarted that is impious, immoral, or indecent; or when any ſentiments are uttered that tend to pollute the imagination, or corrupt the heart; then all prudent methods muſt be taken to reſtrain ſuch contagious diſcourſe, by introducing ſome more innocent or uſeful topic. Sometimes the licentious converſation may be checked by ſerious reaſoning and grave rebuke, if circumſtances allow, and when there is any proſpect of good from it: but as this is not to be done at all times, as every company will not bear it, and perſons of bad temper will be provoked to proceed to greater outrages, in ſuch caſes we may diſcountenance it by withdrawing from the company, or by ſilence. But let it be obſerved, that it is not every kind of ſilence that can vindicate us; it muſt be a ſignificant and expreſſive ſilence, that bears ſtrong marks of our inward abhorrence of what is paſſing.

Perhaps ſome of my brethren, whoſe ſituation and circumſtances allow them, and whoſe real benevolence of heart leads them, to be more frequently in mixed company, may think theſe rules ſavour too much of preciſeneſs and auſterity; and may imagine, that they have been ſo happy in life, as to recommend themſelves to the upper part of the world, by abating ſomewhat of the rigour of them: but they would do well to conſider, that very probably they

they may afterwards find they have been miſtaken, and that thoſe very perſons to whom they imagined they were acceptable, inwardly contemn them, and take their own time to exclaim with great vehemency againſt them, and againſt the whole order for their ſakes. Theſe rules, Reverend Brethren, relating to our outward behaviour, though they are common and ordinary, and for that very reaſon apt to be overlooked, yet they are of great importance; for when a miniſter's life wants that purity and ſeverity of manners which I have endeavoured to deſcribe, his character can never riſe to that dignity of virtue which begets eſteem and authority, gives weight to his inſtructions, and influence to his example.

II. This rule, *Take heed to thyſelf*, requires us to take care that our real and inward character be agreeable to our external behaviour already deſcribed. We are not to reſt ſatisfied with an entire blameleſſneſs of outward character, but we muſt labour with the utmoſt diligence to acquire thoſe improvements of underſtanding, and that pitch of purity of heart, which will give real worth and dignity to our inward man, and qualify us to fulfil the duties of our important ſtation with pleaſure and ſucceſs.

1. In the firſt place, Let us ſtudy to acquire thoſe improvements of underſtanding, which are in a peculiar manner proper to our ſacred office, and highly neceſſary to anſwer the ends of it. Here it muſt be our firſt and chief care,

to

to clear our minds from thoſe miſtakes and prejudices which darken them, and hinder us from perceiving the full worth and excellence of divine things, and from judging juſtly of the comparative value and importance of the doctrines of religion. This unbiaſſed ſtate of mind is of great importance: it is this that fits us for ſearching into the ſcriptures with fairneſs and impartiality, that we may thence draw the great doctrines of faith pure and entire, without loading Chriſtianity with what does not belong to it, or giving up any eſſential or important part of it: it is this too which preſerves from an over-fondneſs for new opinions on the one hand, and from an over-great reverence for long-eſtabliſhed ones on the other, and leads us to examine diſputed points with great ſilence, ſuſpenſe, and coolneſs, until full enquiry and ſtrong evidence oblige us to take a ſide. But beſide an unprejudiced mind, there are other previous qualifications neceſſary to obtain a thorough acquaintance with the great doctrines of religion, as they are delivered in the ſcriptures; ſuch as a knowledge of the rules of right reaſoning, and of the great principles of natural religion, together with a tolerable acquaintance with the original languages of the ſacred authors, and with the hiſtory, antiquities, prevailing cuſtoms, and ordinary alluſions of the reſpective ages in which they were written. Without theſe previous preparations we cannot hope to reach the true meaning of the ſacred books, to explain and illuſtrate them in a clear

and

and delightful manner, and to judge with juſt diſcernment and taſte, of the beauty, propriety, and force of their ſtyle. To which we may add, that without theſe previous branches of knowledge, we cannot ſucceſsfully defend our holy religion againſt thoſe attacks that are openly made upon it in our age: for it is in the holy ſcriptures that the chief evidence of our religion is exhibited to our view; and it is from the wrong tranſlations, falſe interpretations, and ſcholaſtic and metaphyſical ſyſtems wreſted from them, that the chief objections againſt it are drawn.

After having ſtudied the great principles of natural religion and morality, and learned the important truths of Chriſtianity, from an honeſt inquiry into divine revelation, it muſt be our next care to ſtore our minds with a large treaſure of the beſt moral and divine ſentiments. Thoſe are the choice furniture of our ſouls; and from a plentiful ſtore of them we ſhall find we are both qualified and diſpoſed to teach others in the moſt inſtructive and affecting manner. The holy ſcriptures will furniſh us with a rich variety of the pureſt and ſublimeſt ſentiments moral and divine: and in other writers ancient and modern we may find a great number more, or at leaſt the ſame greatly diverſified, and ſet in a thouſand beautiful and ſtriking lights. That our minds may be repleniſhed with an abundant ſtore and delightful variety of ſuch thoughts, ſentiments, and impreſſions, as the beſt of mankind have felt and

deſcribed,

deſcribed, concerning God, providence, virtue, and every thing relating to the great intereſt of mankind, we muſt gather from all quarters: whether the writers be Chriſtian or Pagan, let us think it our duty to borrow whatever is good and pure, whatever bears the marks of a heart ſmitten with the love of truth and virtue. But as virtue, when diſplayed in the pureſt precepts or beſt deſcriptions, has only a faint and languid power over our minds, when compared with what we feel when it appears exerted into action in the moſt intereſting circumſtances of a good man's life, it muſt be of very great uſe to us, to be furniſhed with a large collection of the moſt uncommon and ſtriking examples of the ſeveral moral and divine virtues which are to be found either in ſacred or common hiſtory. When theſe are introduced in a proper place, and painted with true ſimplicity, they can never fail to awaken the attention of the hearers, make deep impreſſions on their minds, continue rivetted in their memories, and give them the plaineſt, juſteſt, and moſt engaging view of the great virtues of the Chriſtian life. And that theſe improvements of underſtanding may be more uſeful to the world, we muſt firſt endeavour to attain that inſight into the make and frame of the human mind, which will point out to us the ſhorteſt, moſt ſucceſsful, and agreeable method, of informing the underſtanding, and touching the heart; and then to acquire that knowledge of the world, of the tempers and characters of men, which will direct

us how to adviſe and reprove without offence, and with juſt hope of ſucceſs. There remain many other branches of knowledge, which would not only be ornamental, but highly uſeful to us in the way of our ſacred buſineſs; but the time allotted for this diſcourſe will not allow me to enumerate them.

To conclude this head of diſcourſe, let it be obſerved, that beſides the great advantages of learning already mentioned, there are others not to be deſpiſed: A large field of ſcience affords our minds a delightful ſcene, in which they may expatiate with pleaſure: the pleaſing projects and hopes of making improvement in this or the other branch of uſeful literature, enliven life, and preſerve it from that languor, and deadneſs, to which it can ſcarce fail to be ſubjected, when it is not animated with ſome deſign, or directed to ſome valuable end: and, which is ſtill of more importance, the thirſt and purſuit of knowledge may contribute to preſerve us from that immerſion into worldly affairs, of which thoſe muſt be in no ſmall danger, who have not ſome employment for their leiſure hours. To which may be added, that without a competent degree of knowlege, we can ſcarce eſcape falling into ſuch blunders, in our public appearances as well as private converſation, as muſt expoſe us to the ridicule of the more knowing and ingenious part of mankind. But amidſt all our ſpeculative ſtudies let us ſtill remember, that all the improvements of the underſtanding, all the treaſures of the memory,

all the ornaments of the imagination, muſt be employed and made ſubſervient to the purification and refinement of the heart.—Which leads me to conſider,

2. In the ſecond place, thoſe moral endowments which are required of us by the rule of the apoſtle in the text, and which are abſolutely neceſſary to fit us for the performing of the duties of our ſacred office with faithfulneſs and ſucceſs. As the heart is the ſeat of all the virtues, the whole improvement of it conſiſts in cheriſhing and ſtrengthening within our boſoms, all thoſe virtues of the Chriſtian life which it is our duty to teach and recommend unto others. There is one diſpoſition, which forms a principal part of that temper of mind which becomes a miniſter of the goſpel of Jeſus, and has a mighty influence on his whole behaviour, and every part of his conduct, and therefore ſhould be cultivated by us with the utmoſt care; and that is, a remarkable elevation of ſoul above this preſent ſenſible world, and all its tranſitory enjoyments. Our hearts cannot be raiſed to this divine temper in any other way, but by a full conviction, that all thoſe things which the bulk of mankind love with ſo much ardour, and purſue with ſuch keenneſs, can never make them happy; and that the true happineſs of life ariſes from the exerciſe of purity, ſincerity, charity, piety, the conſciouſneſs of theſe virtues, the ſenſe of the divine favour, and the raviſhing proſpect of a bleſſed immortality. That we may attain this real elevation of ſoul, we muſt

accuſtom ourſelves to a frequent and lively contemplation of God, to a ſtedfaſt imitation of all his moral perfections, and to rejoice above all things in the humble and modeſt hope of being exalted to the perfect and everlaſting enjoyment of him in an eternal world. For if we once felt and experienced the happineſs that the contemplation of God, the reſemblance of his moral perfections, and the ſenſe of his friendſhip affords, there would ſpring from thence an unalterable perſuaſion, that life, with all its other enjoyments, without theſe pure and ſpiritual pleaſures, is but a vain dream, a tranſient ſhadow, a ſeries of deluſive amuſements, which may flatter us for a while with fair and diſtant promiſes of happineſs, but muſt ſoon leave us in diſappointment and ſorrow. Without this ſtrong ſenſe of the vanity and emptineſs of all preſent and ſenſible things, and a clear view of the reality, importance, and tranſcendent worth of ſpiritual and unſeen objects, we are not prepared to deſcend into the world, and to encounter the temptations of it. It is this elevation of ſoul that muſt inſpire us with a hearty contempt of that ſcrambling for worldly dignity and advancement, which muſt certainly be a great reproach to us, who inculcate upon others, that it ought to be their only ambition to act their part well in that ſtation Providence has aſſigned them, and to obtain the approbation of God, which is the perfection of glory and honour. It is this muſt preſerve us from the mean and ſordid deſign of ſcraping together wealth

wealth and riches, which is utterly unbecoming us, who call on the rest of mankind to moderate their desires of these things, and whose business it is to persuade others, that the friendship of God, and those virtues and graces which form them to his resemblance, are the only real and durable riches; and it is this must secure ourselves from being dazzled with the shew and glitter of human life, while we preach unto others, that "the fashion of this world passeth away," and that spiritual and divine things alone shine with real and everlasting glory. It is the experience of the joys of a heavenly frame of mind, that must prevent our mingling with the generality of mankind, in their low and sordid pursuits, and entering with vehemence into their little parties and factions, formed on worldly views, and conducted by worldly measures. It is an high relish of the pleasures of the spiritual and divine life, which will seat us as it were in security on an eminence, from whence we may look down with wonder mixt with pity on the blinded sons of men, who, like children, are contending with the utmost keenness for baubles and toys, which dazzle their eyes for a while with a vain glare, but must soon vanish like a dream. In this situation of mind, and with this mournful view of the state of mankind, we must be animated with the warmest zeal to take the vail off their eyes, and convince them of their ignorance.

What ignorance? I do not mean their ignorance of the intimate natures and essences of

things; their ignorance of the great plan of Providence, and of numberleſs paſt, preſent, and future tranſactions of the univerſe; in a word, I do not mean that ignorance of things which is commonly acknowledged, even by the acuteſt philoſophers, though no doubt that kind of ignorance is humbling enough: but I mean a more lamentable, more mortifying, more fatal ignorance; their ignorance of thoſe things which are the proper ſcience of man in his preſent ſtate; their ignorance of the inherent baſeneſs of vice, and the miſery that is inſeparable from it; and of the intrinſic excellence of virtue, and the happineſs that always accompanies it; their ignorance of the vanity and nothingneſs of worldly pleaſures, and the everlaſting worth and importance of ſpiritual and divine enjoyments; in a word, their ignorance of this great and cardinal truth, "That it is "life eternal to know the only true God, and "Jeſus Chriſt whom he hath ſent." How pathetic and emphatical is the deſcription we have of this blindneſs of mankind, Rev. iii. 17. "Thou ſayeſt, I am rich, and increaſed with "goods, and have need of nothing; and know"eſt not that thou art wretched, and miſe"rable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Let it be obſerved, that what is ſaid here about the ignorance of mankind, is not to be underſtood, as if they had no theory or ſpeculative notions about the chief good, and true happineſs; for the greateſt part of them have ſomething of this kind; but it is to be underſtood of their not

not having ſuch an intimate and over-bearing conviction of this grand truth, That the only true happineſs lies in the knowledge, the love, the reſemblance, the enjoyment of God the ſovereign good, as will make every other ſhadow of happineſs quite diſappear, and leave the mind in the full and unalterable perſuaſion, that this ſpiritual happineſs is all in all for time and for eternity.

Beſides the many great advantages already mentioned ariſing from a true elevation of ſoul above ſenſible things, we may add ſeveral more; ſuch as, that it gives a real dignity to our inward character, a commanding influence to our example, an uncommon force and ſublimity to our diſcourſes, renders our buſineſs our chief delight and joy, and makes "our light ſo to ſhine "before men, that they ſeeing our good works, "ſhall glorify our heavenly Father." But the time allotted for this diſcourſe will not permit us to enlarge on theſe.

Perhaps ſome may think, that what is ſaid here, about that purity and elevation of heart which becomes an inſtructor of mankind, is painted too high, and far beyond the life. But ſurely it muſt be owned, that it is our duty to aim at the higheſt pitch of virtue attainable in this preſent ſtate. And a little attention may convince us, that we are capable of arriving at incomparably higher impreſſions of God and divine things than we commonly feel. We may, by due care, and the aids of divine grace, riſe to a pitch of eſteem, admiration, love, and

joy, in the contemplation of God, compared with which, our ordinary ſentiments and feelings are but like the faint impreſſion made upon our minds by the idea of the ſun when abſent, compared with what we are conſcious of when we behold him ſhining in all his glory. Nay, is it not matter of wonder and aſtoniſhment, that we who believe, we who inculcate upon others, that there is almighty power, infinite wiſdom, and perfect goodneſs, perpetually preſiding over the univerſe, and engaged on the ſide of righteouſneſs and righteous perſons, is it not, I ſay, very amazing, that by this belief our ſouls are not raiſed into a perpetual tranſport of joy and wonder, to ſomething tranſcendently higher than we have yet felt, than we can well expreſs by all the power of language? Surely it muſt appear very ſurpriſing to thoſe who conſider things calmly, that we who preach to others, that "life and immorta-"lity are brought to light by the goſpel," and who pretend to entertain the firm and unſhaken hope of another and better life, are not eſtabliſhed by that glorious hope in an uninterrupted and delightful exaltation of ſoul, above all thoſe things which engroſs the hearts, and employ the whole lives, of worldly men. Can there be a more elevating, a more triumphant expectation, than that of living for ever in the abodes of perfect knowledge, virtue, and happineſs? Is it not the natural effect of ſuch a glorious hope, to deaden in us the love of this vain world, and make us pant after a better?

1 John iii. 3. "Every man that hath this hope "in him, purifieth himſelf, even as he is pure." Let us endeavour, then, by the proper helps of retirement, meditation, and prayer, to attain clearer views of the Deity, and of divine things, to feel higher impreſſions of their worth and majeſty, and to grow daily more convinced of their reality and importance, and of the joy and happineſs that ariſe from the love and contemplation of them.

But let none conclude from what is ſaid, that it is the duty of a miniſter of the goſpel to devote his whole life to contemplation, to retire from the world, and maintain as little converſe with mankind as an hermit ſhut up in his cell. By no means. The moſt perfect character of a teacher of true religion is, that of one who lives among mankind, converſes with them, and at the ſame time retains as much purity of mind, and diſcovers as much diſengagement of heart from the world, as if he were entirely ſeparated from it. For ſuch a man is fitted to moderate the deſires of worldly things in the reſt of mankind, to lower their high notions of the excellence and happineſs which they imagine to ariſe from the poſſeſſion and enjoyment of them, to diſplay the ſuperior worth and importance of thoſe things which are ſpiritual and divine, and to ſpread a ſenſe of God and religion where-ever he goes, and with whomſoever he converſes. That this is the proper character of a teacher of true religion, is very evident; for this was the character of Jeſus.

Before

Before I finiſh this part of the diſcourſe, concerning that temper of mind which is in a peculiar manner becoming us who are miniſters of the goſpel, and highly neceſſary to qualify us to fulfil the duties of our ſtation, I muſt mention one important virtue, which ſhould be cultivated with the greateſt care, and raiſed to its higheſt pitch; and that is, an unfeigned good-will and kind affection to our brethren of mankind. For this purpoſe, let us conſider them in all thoſe tender views, which may contribute to endear them to us, not only as children of the ſame great parent of all, and as partakers of the ſame nature; but as creatures, fallen and degraded; in the ſame ſtate of ignorance, corruption, and guilt; as exiles in the ſame place of baniſhment from our native country; as fellow-ſufferers in the ſame ſcene of miſery and diſtreſs; as being equally liable to all the pains and calamities of this life, and equally ſubject to the ſtroke of death; as fellow-travellers towards the ſame unſeen world; as followers of the ſame great leader; and as having all the difficulties and hardſhips of our ſtruggling ſtate of pilgrimage, ſweetened with hopes depending on the ſame great friend and benefactor of human kind, even the hopes of mingling with the divine aſſembly above, and there triumphing for ever over all the miſeries of this mortal ſtate. And if we lay open our ſouls to the full power of theſe intereſting views of our fellow-creatures, we ſhall ſoon feel our hearts ſtreaming out towards them in ſuch a ſtrong flow of

tenderneſs

tenderneſs and benevolence, as will extinguiſh the pride and vanity that is apt to ariſe from the little accidental advantages one man has above another. How is it poſſible, that our hearts ſhould ſwell with pride, upon the account of any little tranſient ſuperiority, when we reflect, that we are all on a level in ſo many important circumſtances, and that all worldly diſtinctions will ſoon be annihilated?

It is from theſe views too of our Chriſtian brethren, that we ſhall feel our hearts melted down into a mild and forgiving temper. Has any one injured us? let us conſider mankind in a juſt light, and it will immediately ſtrike us, that the injury was done, either through ignorance, or the impetuoſity of ſome ungovernable paſſion. In both which caſes, he that did the wrong is more a proper object of pity and compaſſion, than of anger and reſentment. Beſides, how can we continue implacable to others, for thoſe miſtakes and workings of irregular paſſions to which we are liable ourſelves?

To which we may add, as a thing of great importance, that it is from conſidering our brethren in theſe endearing views, that we ſhall feel ourſelves inſpired with the principles of true Chriſtian moderation. When we obſerve others differing from us in opinion about leſſer points; or even, as it appears to us, erring from the truth in more important matters; it will immediately occur to us, we are all in a ſtate of much darkneſs, and equally liable to miſtakes and errors. If we revolve this one

thought

thought in our minds with due attention, it can ſcarce fail to ſoften our hearts, and move us rather with pity, than paſſion and bitterneſs. Real love and affectionate ſympathy, and juſt views of human nature, will lead us to reflect on all that vaſt variety of circumſtances, which may prevail on honeſt and worthy minds, to embrace opinions widely different from thoſe which we have eſpouſed; and conſequently will inſpire us with an abhorrence of the unchriſtian practice of repreſenting their miſtakes and deſigns as worſe than they really are, and of judging harſhly about their ſtate in another world, and deſiring or endeavouring to expoſe them to ill uſage in this. In one word, real love will invariably incline us to make the largeſt allowances for the infirmities of mankind, to judge charitably of the honeſty and ſincerity of their hearts and intentions, and to be more forward to proclaim their virtues than their miſtakes and failings.

Further, one great advantage ariſing from a mild and moderate conduct, is, that it places us in the moſt favourable ſituation for rectifying the miſtakes and errors of thoſe who have unhappily fallen into them. As long as we diſcover a real tenderneſs for their intereſts and characters, we may juſtly hope they will hearken to our reaſons, and lay open their minds to conviction. But ſo ſoon as we betray anger and bitterneſs, or uſe them harſhly, we thereby prevent all the effect of the ſtrongeſt arguments. When we ſee, for inſtance,

ſtance, youth, through a fondneſs for novelty, and the raſhneſs to which that ſeaſon of life is liable, hurried away to eſpouſe new opinions with great vehemence, and throw off eſtabliſhed doctrines, before they have time to conſider and underſtand them; if we then diſcover paſſion and reſentment, we can never hope to have any power over their minds. But if we ſhow them by the whole courſe of our behaviour, that we retain a ſincere good-will to them, and a hearty concern for their intereſts; we may then perhaps prevail upon them to liſten to our reaſonings, and to ſuſpend their forming any fixed judgement about the matter, until cooler thought, and more thorough examination, make them fitter judges of things. The experience of mankind juſtifies this obſervation: a man of wiſdom and moderation ſometimes convinces and reclaims thoſe who have been miſled; but the wrath of man "never works the righteouſneſs of God," nor can he ever hope to ſucceed in his deſigns, who acts counter the meek and humble ſpirit of our bleſſed Saviour. This deſerves the ſerious conſideration of all friends to truth and virtue, and eſpecially of thoſe who are any way concerned in the education of the riſing generation.

Further, that general view of mankind preſented to us above, will naturally lead us forward to conſider our reſpective congregations, in a nearer and more intereſting point of light, even as a certain portion of thoſe fellow-travellers committed to our care through this

journey

journey of human life, and, by the appointment of Providence, eſpecially intruſted to us for direction, aſſiſtance, and conſolation. When we view our people in this new and endearing relation, as depending on us, for inſtruction when ignorant, for help when diſtreſſed, and for comfort when afflicted, we muſt be very inſenſible if we do not feel a new flow of good-will towards them, a ſtrong inclination to enter into their concerns, to take their pains and feelings upon us, and to watch for opportunities of doing them good. What though kind offices among them ſhould take up much time, require much pains, put us to much real trouble and inconvenience, rob us of many agreeable amuſements, and greatly interrupt delightful and uſeful ſtudies? Senſe of duty, love to our people, and the pleaſure of doing good, will reconcile us to all theſe hardſhips. A juſt ſenſe of the important relations we ſtand in to our reſpective flocks, and a genuine feeling of that tender affection which is due to them, will not allow us to heſitate one moment, whether that part of our time is moſt worthily employed which is taken up in doing real offices of friendſhip among them, or that part of it which is ſpent in peruſing the fineſt writings of the greateſt geniuſes that ever appeared in the world, or in poliſhing any little compoſitions of our own. Is the arranging of words, the meaſuring of periods, the beautifying of language, or even ſtoring our own minds with the divineſt ſentiments, an employment of equal

dignity and importance in itself, or equally pleasant on reflection, with that of composing differences; extinguishing animosities; searching out modest indigent merit, and relieving it; comforting a melancholy heart; giving counsel to a perplexed mind; suspending pain by our sympathy and presence, though it were but for a moment; suggesting to an unfurnished mind proper materials for meditation in the time of distress; or laying hold of a favourable opportunity of conveying valuable instructions and religious impressions to a mind little susceptible of them on other occasions? There is no need of saying any thing in confirmation of this; it was the glorious character of Jesus, that "he "went about doing good."

That we may be still more animated to cherish a real and tender affection to the people committed to our care, let us consider, that it must greatly increase our power of doing them good. A sincere good-will expressed by a constant series of kind offices, is the surest method of gaining the love and confidence of mankind: it is a powerful charm, which hardly ever fails to conquer every heart. Those of the meanest as well as those of the greatest capacity, perceive it, and feel its force: even those who could not be won by any other methods, and who were perhaps determined to despise and neglect us, or thwart us in our designs, will not be able to stand out long against the power of uniform and unconquerable goodness. And when we have once been so happy as to gain

the love and confidence of our people, it must be our own fault if they are not much bettered by us: for we have then ready access to their hearts; and our instructions either in public or private will be listened to with pleasure, and sucked in with greediness: and our reproofs and admonitions, when flowing from love, will be received, not only without resentment, but with strong desires of amendment: so that we may succeed even beyond our expectations in promoting the eternal as well as temporal interest of the people of whom we have the charge. But let us remember not to abuse their confidence, by making use of it to carry on our own worldly designs, or to feed our vanity with their applauses; but employ it only for the noble and divine purposes of rendering them daily wiser, better, and happier.

To conclude the illustration of this first rule, let us who are the ministers of the gospel of Jesus, carefully study that blamelessness of life, and that peculiar cast and turn of inward character, without which we can never discharge the duties of our important station, with pleasure to ourselves, or advantage to others. And in order to this, we must learn to dread and cautiously avoid that rock on which many split; the resting satisfied with an imaginary excellence of outward character, while they are conscious they possess but very low measures of that inward excellence which alone can render them beautiful in the eye of God. Is it not almost incredible, that reasonable beings

should

ſhould labour ſo induſtriouſly and unwearied to embelliſh and expoſe to view an imaginary ſelf, whoſe ſole exiſtence is in the idea or breath of others, while they ſtupidly neglect to improve and adorn the real ſelf within their own boſoms? Yet, ſtrange as it is, daily obſervation puts it beyond all doubt, that great numbers of men endeavour, with the greateſt eagerneſs, to croud all noble endowments and great virtues into their outward character, while they have not ſo much as made one ſincere and vigorous effort to better their inward man. Is not this conduct juſt as vain and ridiculous, as if a man ſhould be at the utmoſt pains to beautify a picture, and to make the whole world admire and applaud it as his exact likeneſs, while at the ſame time it had not the leaſt reſemblance of him; and his only ſafety from the utmoſt contempt, lies in hiding himſelf, and never allowing any one to compare the real uglineſs and deformity of his perſon with the comelineſs and beauty of his pretended image?

I remember a paſſage of an ancient author, in which this folly of mankind is repreſented in a very ſtrong light: 'I have often wonder-'ed,' ſays he, 'how it ſhould come to paſs, that 'when every man loves himſelf more than o-'thers, yet every man ſhould regard the opi-'nions of others concerning him, more than 'his own: For if God, or an angel ſtanding 'by, ſhould command any of us, to think no-

'thing by himself, but what he should presently speak out, no man would be able to endure it for so much as one day. Thus we fear more what our neighbour will think of us, than what we think and know of ourselves.'

S. L. R.

SERMON IX.

The Subject continued.

1 TIM. iv. 16.

Take heed unto thyself, and unto thy doctrine; and continue in them: for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

WE proceed now to the second rule in the text, *Take heed to thy doctrine.* What is neceſſary for explaining and illuſtration of this rule, plainly ariſes from what has been ſaid on the former. The proper improvement of the underſtanding already mentioned, will fit us for teaching the truths of religion: and the purity of the heart already deſcribed, prepares and diſpoſes us to inculcate the morals and duties of it.

I. As to the truths of religion. From the diligent and impartial ſtudy of the holy ſcriptures and natural religion, we ſhall be qualified to teach all thoſe truths which are diſcoverable only by revelation, as well as thoſe which the light of reaſon and revelation conſpire to dictate. It cannot be called in queſtion, but that by this rule, *Of taking heed to our doctrine*, a principal thing required of us is to declare the whole ſcheme of Chriſtianity ſo far as it is revealed, without any mixture of human

invention, in that plainneſs and ſimplicity in which it is delivered in the holy ſcriptures. That we may do this with greater faithfulneſs and impartiality, we muſt not repreſent Chriſtianity as a chain of abſtract ſpeculations, and metaphyſical truths, linked together in a certain order, and in a certain form of words of human contrivance; but as a ſet of important facts, or remarkable ſcenes of the great plan of Providence, in which mankind are deeply intereſted, and which could not have been brought to light but by immediate revelation. When Chriſtianity is repreſented in this view, it will not only make it more eaſily underſtood, but alſo more eaſily defended againſt the objections of its adverſaries.

Thus, that mankind are at preſent in a ſtate of ignorance, guilt, and corruption, is a fact ſeen, felt, and acknowledged. That Jeſus Chriſt the Saviour is the only begotten Son of God, is delivered in ſcripture, in an eaſy manner, as a plain fact: 1 John iii. 16. "God ſo "loved the world, that he ſent his only begot-"ten Son," &c.; Heb. i. 5. "To which of the "angels ſaid he at any time, Thou art my Son, "this day have I begotten thee?" It is further revealed to us, Col. i. 15. 16. that "he is the "image of the inviſible God, the firſt-"born of every creature: for by him were "all things created that are in heaven, and "that are in earth, viſible and inviſible;"—that "he is the head of all principalities and powers," Col. ii. 10.;—and that "in the beginning was

"the

"the Word, and the Word was with God, and "the Word was God," John i. 1. Who can venture to deny any of theſe facts, and to aſſert, there is no perſon exiſting to whom all theſe characters, in their full, proper, and higheſt ſenſe, may be aſcribed? Who can pretend, that his piercing eye hath ſurveyed the whole univerſe, and can declare that no ſuch perſon exiſts? Who has preſumption enough to affirm, that he has ſeen through all the poſſibilities of things, and can aſſure us, that it is impoſſible any ſuch perſon can exiſt?

That "the Word was made fleſh," is mentioned in ſcripture as another fact. His incarnation is no doubt a myſterious miraculous thing. Is not the incarnation of any ſpiritual being an inexplicable thing to us, and quite beyond the reach of our faculties? That he taught us the will of God by his doctrine, and ſet us a pattern of perfect virtue in his life, is another ſimple matter of fact eaſily comprehended. That by his humiliation, ſufferings, and death, he made atonement for the ſins of men; that, as a reward of his extraordinary obedience and ſufferings, "he is exalted above "every name;" that he now exerciſes a real, though inviſible, dominion over the world, and that he will come to judge us at the laſt day in righteouſneſs, are all delivered in ſcripture, in an eaſy manner, as important parts of the great ſcheme of univerſal providence, and in which our higheſt intereſts are involved.

Now it muſt be acknowledged, that it is an indiſpenſable

indiſpenſable part of our duty, as teachers of the religion of Jeſus, to declare theſe and all the other truths diſcovered to us by revelation. We cannot juſtify ourſelves as having declared the whole counſel of God, if we overlook any of them, neglect to teach them, or treat them only in a tranſient and ſuperficial manner. For theſe doctrines of Chriſtianity are of the higheſt importance to mankind. Is it not of importance, of great importance, to creatures, in a ſtate of ignorance, corruption, and guilt, to have it made known to them, by an undoubted revelation, that, in the original plan of the divine government, there is a remedy provided for their misfortunes? How comfortable and rejoicing is the diſcovery, that there is a particular diſpenſation of Providence carrying on by the Son and Spirit of God, for the recovery and ſalvation of mankind, who are in a ſtate of apoſtaſy and ruin! Does it not mightily concern us to know thoſe duties, and inward acts of religion, which are due to Jeſus Chriſt the Mediator, and the Holy Ghoſt the Guide and Sanctifier of mankind? Is it not beyond all contradiction a matter of unſpeakable importance, to have it confirmed to us by an infallible revelation, that this whole univerſe is one vaſt and immortal empire, of which God is the King and Head; and that virtue and devotion are the great, the ſtanding, and everlaſting laws of this great kingdom, to which all rational beings ought to pay a voluntary ſubjection? Can it be denied to be of the higheſt conſequence to us,

to

to have the particular branches of this great law of virtue, delivered to us by a meſſenger from heaven, clothed with the higheſt authority; and not to be left to gather them from ancient traditions of an uncertain ſource, from long deductions of human reaſonings, from the admonitions of ſome old philoſophers, or from the dictates of our own hearts, where there are ſuch great mixtures of impurity? Is it not a great advantage, to have all theſe great rules of life exemplified in a perfect pattern, by one clothed in fleſh, and "who was in all points "tempted like as we are, and yet without ſin?" Is it not a thing of univerſally acknowledged importance, to have it aſcertained to us by one who came from the ſpiritual and unſeen world, that the righteous ſhall live there in immortal happineſs and glory, and that the wicked and diſobedient ſhall be thruſt down to a place of everlaſting puniſhment? Is it not of importance to the world, that theſe great truths of Chriſtianity ſhould be imprinted on the minds of the preſent race of men, and tranſmitted down to ſucceeding generations? Is there a ſucceſſion of teachers appointed in the Chriſtian church for this very purpoſe? let us then bethink ourſelves, how we ſhall anſwer to the world, to our own conſciences, and to God the Judge of all, if we fail in this great branch of our duty.

II. As to the duties of religion. This rule, *Take heed to thy doctrine*, requires us to take heed how we teach the duties of the goſpel.

That

That purity and elevation of heart which was recommended under the former rule, will both qualify and diſpoſe us to teach and inculcate the whole compaſs of practical religion and morality, in the higheſt pitch of perfection attainable by mankind. It is of great conſequence, to diſplay a high ſtandard of morals before the eyes of mankind; for nothing can be more dangerous, than to lower and accommodate it to the prevailing taſtes or opinions of a degenerate age. If we come low, men will ſatisfy themſelves with ſomething ſtill lower. Our Saviour has ſufficiently directed our conduct in this matter, both by his doctrine and example: Matth. v. 48. "Be ye perfect, as "your heavenly Father is perfect."—"Thou "ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, "and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind: "—Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf; "Matth. xxii. 37. 39." His whole divine ſermon on the mount, is a ſummary of pure religion, freed from all thoſe corrupt gloſſes and abatements which had been introduced to favour by the corruptions of the human heart; and his life is a ſtanding and viſible pattern of the higheſt and pureſt virtue. Now, though we cannot expect that mankind will ever arrive, in this ſtate of imperfection, to a perfect conformity to the divine law; yet it is of great uſe to ſet the ſublime ſtandard full in their view. For we can never unvail to mankind in a clear manner, their hidden hypocriſy and corruption, check the growth of their ſecret pride, beget

in

in them humility and lowliness of mind, and lead them to value justly that joyful doctrine of Christianity, That God accepts of sincerity instead of perfection, through the propitiation of Jesus, unless we give them a full view of the purity and perfection of the divine law, and direct them to compare themselves impartially with it, and thus convince them how far they fall below it. Besides, we can never explain the great doctrine of sincerity, as a term of our acceptance with God, in such a way as that it shall not be liable to many dangerous abuses, unless we represent a perpetual aim and endeavour at a higher degree of perfection, as the very essence, or at least an inseparable property, of it. Neither can we carry Christians forward in a constant progress toward perfection, unless we show them some pitch of it which they have not yet attained, to tempt their sight, and animate their endeavours.

But we must not leave this head without observing, that when we have set before our hearers the purest and highest standard of religion, it is our duty at the same time to admonish them not to rely too far on it. Men may have the justest and sublimest ideas of virtue and religion, and yet remain under the power of their guilty passions. Nay, perhaps it is easier to frame the highest ideas of what is our duty in every circumstance of life, than to practise the lowest: all our ideas are only pictures or images of things in our imagination; and what appears fair and beautiful to men in the theory,

they are inclined to believe muſt have the poſ-ſeſſion of their hearts, and a mighty influence on their lives. But in this they are often fatal-ly miſtaken. For when we look around us in the world, there is nothing more obſervable, than that many who have formed the pureſt and worthieſt conceptions of the divine per-fections, continue in a great meaſure void of thoſe devout affections of heart which are due to them. In like manner, many of thoſe who diſplay in their diſcourſes and writings, the juſteſt and nobleſt views of the native excel-lence of virtue, and its importance to the hap-pineſs of mankind, make very melancholy diſ-coveries in their life, that it has ſcarce any power over their hearts. As therefore they are apt to deceive themſelves, fondly imagining that theſe things are inſeparably connected to-gether, which daily obſervation and experience convinces us are widely diſtant, it is certainly the buſineſs of thoſe who are appointed their inſtructors, to guard them againſt ſuch dan-gerous and fatal miſtakes.

Again, the goodneſs of heart required and expected from us by the former rule, muſt lead us to remark, with great concern, the manifold failures of mankind in the great duties of prac-tical religion; and particularly to obſerve thoſe failures which are moſt remarkable and undiſ-puted in the age or place of the world in which we live. Do we live in an age, when devotion is fallen into diſrepute, when whole ſets of men diſcover many marks of indifference, and con-

tempt of all ſerious appearances of true religion, and look upon pious diſpoſitions as unneceſſary, or ſuperfluous ingredients of a worthy character? In ſuch a ſituation of things, unaffected goodneſs will prompt us to ſuit our inſtructions to the temper of the age, and to dwell upon it ſtrongly, that adoration, eſteem, love, gratitude, truſt, and confidence, are as really due to God, as good-will and acts of beneficence are due to men; that the relations betwixt God and his creatures are at leaſt as real and immutable, as the relations betwixt one creature and another; that the pureſt and moſt durable joys of human life, ariſe from the love of God, and an unbounded truſt and confidence in his providence; nay, that without the love of God, and truſt in his goodneſs, there is a thick darkneſs ſpread over all things, and all rational ſecurity of joy is quite deſtroyed; that truth, integrity, and charity, and all the ſocial virtues, muſt want their great ſupport, when there is no hope, no truſt in an Almighty Being, who delights in theſe virtues, and is the preſent friend, and will be the eternal rewarder, of thoſe who uniformly practiſe them; and that the want of juſt and rational piety towards God, whatever other virtues we may boaſt of, certainly ſhall not paſs unpuniſhed under his righteous adminiſtration.

Beſides what is already ſaid concerning the neceſſity and advantages of true devotion, there remains another conſideration of very great importance, namely, that not only the ſtable and

uniform practice of all the virtues, but alſo the purity and perfection of them in the eye of God, depend in a great meaſure on a ſtrong ſenſe of infinite perfection, and what is due to it. For the illuſtration of this point, let us ſuppoſe a man, whoſe character is not only beautified with all the private virtues, truth, ſincerity, juſtice, charity, temperance, fortitude; but alſo with all the public virtues, zeal for the common good of ſociety, unwearied labours to promote it, and joy in the eſtabliſhment and advancement of it: if ſuch a perſon ſhould contemplate his virtues with a ſelfiſh kind of delight, as his own productions, and the fruits of his own labour and induſtry, inwardly valuing himſelf upon account of them, and ſecretly triumphing in his ſuperiority to others; is it not evident, that this mixture of vanity and ſelf-applauſe would greatly ſully the beauty and diminiſh the worth of the character, in the judgement of God, and every good being? Now, is there any ſuch effectual method of bearing down that ſelf-admiration, and ſelf-complacency, which is ſo apt to ariſe from the view of any little excellencies we poſſeſs, as comparing them with the infinite perfections of the divine nature, (which muſt make them almoſt quite diſappear), and the habitual acknowledging from the bottom of our hearts, that it is God who makes us differ from others, and beſtows upon us all thoſe virtues and talents of which we are ſo unjuſtly proud, and which we ſo vainly and fooliſhly aſcribe to ourſelves?

selves? Does not the viewing our graces, attainments, and accomplishments, in this light, show us the reasonableness and equity of ascribing to God, and not to ourselves, all the praise and glory of them? We ought therefore to insist upon it, as an important and essential principle of religion, that as every good thing comes from God, it should be referred to him, and the whole honour and glory of it sincerely and perpetually ascribed to him: and that without this, there can be no perfect humility, no thorough greatness of soul, no stable, pure, disinterested virtue, no character entirely worthy and acceptable in the sight of him whose judgement is always according to truth. That this is not mere speculation, unsupported by experience and observation, might be made evident, if it would not protract the discourse too much: for upon a careful examination of the history of ancient and modern ages, it would appear, that those who have been celebrated for a pure, disinterested, and stable integrity and public spirit, were also remarkable for a pious veneration of the Deity, and a humble acknowledgement that their virtues, talents, and successes, were entirely owing to the goodness of his providence. That these considerations may have the greater weight, we must represent to our hearers, in the strongest manner, that they are founded on the authority of divine revelation, and on this grand and undeniable truth, that the infinite goodness of God is the source of our existence and virtues, and of all that is

great, lovely, or good in any part of this vaſt univerſe: "From the Father of lights cometh "every good and perfect gift, and therefore, "not unto us, not unto us, but to him be the "glory."

Further, it may be of ſingular uſe, to repreſent the various acts of religion, in thoſe amiable and inviting lights which may touch the heart. Thus, how pleaſant a ſcene muſt it be, to behold a perſon of undoubted worth and virtue withrawn from the noiſe and hurry of worldly affairs, all alone, ſilent, and ſolemn, lifting up his eyes to heaven, and fixing his thoughts on God his Maker, devoutly acknowledging him with the warmeſt gratitude, as the author of his being, the preſerver of his life, the fountain of his preſent enjoyments, and the grand foundation of his future hopes; praying him to forgive his ſins, to teach him his will, and to guide him forward in the paths of uprightneſs; and reſigning himſelf without reſerve to the diſpoſal of his providence, and ſettling his mind in perfect peace by truſting firmly in him? Again, let us ſuppoſe a family living in peace, harmony, and the uniform practice of all virtue; regularly uniting their hearts and voices in hymns of praiſe to God with every morning's light, and when the ſhadows of the evening are ſtretched out, recalling their thoughts from the world, by a ſong of praiſe to "Him, who makes the out-goings of the even-"ings and the mornings to rejoice; and then "laying themſelves down to ſleep in peace, be-

"cauſe

"cauſe their God ſuſtains them:" let us likewiſe ſuppoſe larger and more numerous ſocieties meeting together in religious aſſemblies, to pay their joint homage and adoration to the great Parent of all, to celebrate his univerſal and never-failing goodneſs in joyful ſongs of praiſe, and to offer up their united and fervent prayers, that he may perpetually diſpoſe them to walk uprightly, that he may "be to them a "ſun and ſhield," may "give them grace and "glory, and with-hold no good thing from "them:"

Is there any thing unlovely or forbidding, any thing unworthy of human nature, in ſuch exercieſes of devotion? Should we have reaſon to be aſhamed, if we were found employed in them? Let us ſuppoſe we knew a country in which private and public acts of pure religion were in reputation, and regularly performed with ſolemnity, ſincerity, and unaffected ardor; ſhould we not love that country, and almoſt wiſh we were ſo happy as to live in ſuch a joyful and devout ſociety?

Let us further ſuppoſe, that theſe devout worſhippers diſcovered all the genuine marks and ſymptoms of inward devotion in their countenances and outward deportment; could we juſtly expreſs a contempt of them, by calling them ſolemn grimaces, and hypocritical airs? Has not true devotion its juſt and natural features and ſigns in the human countenance, as well as the ſocial and friendly affections? However ſome people, who pretend to

underſtanding and taſte, may ridicule all the appearances and marks of devotion on the outward man; yet it muſt be acknowledged, even by thoſe who conſider things in no higher view than that of taſte, that to be able to obſerve the native and juſt features of real devotion, and to repreſent them in poetry, ſtatuary, or painting, has always been eſteemed one of the nobleſt efforts of a great and worthy genius. Theſe things are ſufficient evidences, that it is the voice of mankind, that devout affections are no wiſe diſhonourable to human nature.

Further, if we feel the full power of pious diſpoſitions in our own breaſts, we ſhall be hence naturally led to make pathetical repreſentations of them to others. Have we many inward and ſilent workings of heart towards God? are we really ſtruck with the contemplation of the divine perfections diſplayed in his works, and in the revelations of his will? are our hearts really penetrated with a ſenſe of his grace and goodneſs? are our ſouls warmed with gratitude, love, and praiſe? do we feel an entire reſt of mind on his providence and promiſes, ſuch a perfect reſt of mind as baniſhes every diſturbing thought, every anxious care, and produces a ſettled tranquillity within our boſoms? can we triumph in the full ſecurity we have for all our valuable intereſts under his perfectly wiſe and righteous adminiſtration? is the "belief, that God is, and that he is the re-"warder of all thoſe that diligently ſeek him;" is this belief like an immoveable rock, on which we

ſtand

ſtand ſafe and happy amidſt all the waves and billows that can roar about us? are we continually gladdened with the glorious hope, that in ſome future period of our exiſtence we ſhall know our God more fully, love him more ardently, and rejoice in him in a more ſure and triumphant manner? Is this the inward ſtate of our minds; then we ſhall find ourſelves diſpoſed to embrace all occaſions of repreſenting theſe delightful feelings in their full ſtrength and force, and with that warmth and emotion that may convince others, they are the genuine ſentiments of our hears: we ſhall not be afraid or aſhamed to own them, but unfold them with freedom and boldneſs; deſcribe them with a noble and manly aſſurance; and thus do our utmoſt to ſpread a ſenſe of religion in an unthinking and irregular age. Whatever ridicule or contempt we may meet with, whatever names of ſuperſtitious or viſionary enthuſiaſts may be beſtowed upon us, let us ſtand by it, and maintain to the laſt, that the joys of religion are the ſun, the light, and the life of our ſouls, in all ſtates, and amidſt all the viciſſitudes of human affairs: nay, let us inſiſt upon it frequently and at full length, that the man who can ſupport life without the rejoicing perſuaſion that there is an Almighty Being at the head of all things, who is engaged on the ſide of virtuous and holy perſons, who befriends them while here, and will render them and their virtues immortal, illuſtrious, and triumphant hereafter, muſt either be quite inſenſible

of

of the excellency of virtue, unconcerned about the eternal proſperity of thoſe who love it and delight in it, or he muſt be ſo entirely immerſed in pleaſures, amuſements, or worldly purſuits, as never to have made one calm and ſerious reflection. Thus let us reckon it our duty and honour, to be advocates for devotion in an age when it is treated with ſo much indifference and contempt, uſing all that variety of arguments in its behalf that reaſon, revelation, or experience can ſuggeſt. And if devotion muſt leave our land, let us have the mournful honour of ſhewing amongſt us its laſt and parting ſteps, ſo that poſterity may be convinced it was not through the fault of thoſe who were appointed the guardians and preſervers of it.

Again, do we live in an age, when other ſets of men think meanly, and ſpeak contemptibly, of truth, juſtice, charity, temperance, humility, and the reſt of the great virtues of the Chriſtian life? we muſt perpetually inculcate upon theſe, that no ſoundneſs in the faith, no ſolemnity of worſhip, no external obſervances, no flaſhes of devotion, no pretended inward manifeſtations, no zeal how warm ſoever for public matters, can ever compenſate for the want of theſe eſſential ingredients of the ſpiritual life. And let us add, that on the practice of theſe virtues, the happineſs of ſociety, and of individuals, in a great meaſure depends. And to crown all, let us dwell upon it ſtrongly, that righteouſneſs, truth, and goodneſs, are the chief glory of God himſelf, and what renders him the worthy ob-

ject

ject of the love and worship of his reasonable offspring; and therefore these virtues must be the brightest ornament of his rational creatures.

Your time will not allow me to enter upon many other things very worthy of our consideration, which belong to this rule, of taking heed to our doctrine; neither will it permit me to enter upon the explication of the third rule, *Continue in them.* Before I proceed to the motives with which these rules are enforced, I must beg to be allowed a few words concerning the manner of our teaching. Here it must be our principal care, to use plainness and simplicity, earnestness and sincerity. We must have no other view but to instruct and persuade those who listen to us, laying aside all affectation, all aims of gaining applause, or advancing any worldy interest. If we are actuated by any of these low motives, they will spoil the whole power, and prevent all the influence with which our discourses might otherwise be accompanied. If we would preach with any just hope of success, we must treat divine subjects with such sincerity and earnestness, as to forget ourselves; and convince our hearers, that we have no other view in speaking, but to stamp those virtuous and pious impressions on their hearts which we feel in our own. We must make it our perpetual care, to confine and fix the attention of the hearer to the subject, and not to the speaker, by never suffering one turn of thought or expression to escape from us, that has no other view than to please and shine. We must

avoid

avoid with a particular care all affectation of fine language, and a glittering kind of eloquence, which whatever uſeleſs admiration it may raiſe in weak judges, muſt produce great contempt in more judicious ones. For thoſe who have a juſt taſte, and true diſcernment, know, that a gaudy and florid ſtyle, how ſoft and agreeable ſoever, can never either touch the heart, or communicate diſtinct and ſtrong views of divine truths. If we would attain to true eloquence, we muſt cheriſh an inward ſenſe of the importance and excellency of ſacred truths, and cultivate a ſtrong feeling of all the virtues. For when our own hearts have once felt the warmth of divine things, it will be eaſy for us to transfuſe it into the breaſts of others. The inward feelings of a good heart have a natural eloquence accompanying them, which can never be equalled by laboured and ſtudied ornament. The heart really and juſtly moved, never fails to dictate a language plain and eaſy, full of natural and continued vigour, which has nothing in it ſoft, nothing languiſhing; all is nervous and ſtrong, and does not ſo much pleaſe the ear, as fill and raviſh the ſoul. Further, let it be taken notice of as a thing of the utmoſt importance, that ſincerity alone, and a real deſire to inſtruct and perſuade, will baniſh all affectation, either of ſentiment or language. This is evident from the conduct of mankind in all circumſtances where they are in earneſt: For inſtance, a wiſe, virtuous, and pious parent, when he has a near proſpect of entering into an

inviſible

invisible world, and only so much strength remaining as to enable him to give his last and dying instructions to his beloved children who stand weeping around him, will he study to express himself with artificial eloquence, and industriously search for glittering ornament? Surely he will not. Or if he should, how absurd, nay, how shocking and monstrous would his conduct appear to every impartial spectator! The application is easy, and there is no occasion for insisting on it. Allow me to conclude this part of the discourse with observing, what has been hinted at above, that this divine eloquence cannot be acquired by human learning, and skill in the choice and arrangement of words, but by a powerful feeling of what is great and good, produced in us by the Holy Spirit of God.

I COME now to the second general head proposed, to consider the motives enforcing the exhortation. And there are two of them: 1. *In doing this, thou shalt save thy own soul.* It is proper to observe, that we are under two different sorts of obligation: the one is, to perform all those duties which belong to our private station, as we are men and Christians; the other is, to perform such duties as belong to that public station wherein Providence has placed us. Both of these are equally necessary to complete a truly good and worthy character. Thus, though a judge should be quite blameless in the whole tenor of his private behaviour,

yet,

yet, if he neglect, through careleſſneſs and indolence, to embrace many opportunities of diſpenſing juſtice, and of promoting the welfare of ſociety by his influence and authority, he would be highly blameable, perhaps as highly blameable, as if he had failed to do juſtice in private life; and could not reaſonably expect to eſcape that puniſhment from the great Judge of all, which ſuch a criminal omiſſion deſerves. In like manner, though a miniſter behaves himſelf with unſpotted virtue and innocence in private life, yet if he has no zeal for anſwering the end of his office; if he ſpends that time in indolence and idleneſs, or even in acquiring real knowledge, which ought to have been employed in doing good offices among his people, or in preparing himſelf to inſtruct them in a more convincing manner; he cannot expect that he ſhall be acquitted at the laſt, either by his own conſcience, or God, who is greater than conſcience.

It deſerves to be remembered as a matter of great importance, and as a very awful conſideration, that negligence or careleſſneſs about the duties of our public ſtation, may have more dreadful conſequences under the government of a righteous judge than we are ordinarily aware of. The criminal omiſſion or careleſs performance of the duties belonging to a public character and ſtation, may be as hurtful to the great intereſts of mankind in this or another life, as poſitive acts of vice and unrighteouſneſs: ſo that none of us can be aſſured, but they may

be followed by as ſevere chaſtiſements in this world, or as dreadful puniſhments in another. If we allow the impreſſions of God and religion to wear out of our peoples minds, by our careleſs or indifferent manner of inſtructing them, ſeveral generations may paſs away before they can be renewed. If we ſow the ſeeds of folly and ſuperſtition among them, through a blind miſtaken zeal, it may take the labours of wiſe and good men for ſeveral ages to root them out. May not that long train of miſchiefs which take their riſe from our negligence, or miſguided zeal, be juſtly charged upon us? If we either neglect to inſtruct our people, or miſlead them, can we be free from the blood of the preſent or ſucceeding generations?

When, therefore, we aſcend our pulpits, behold a liſtening congregation around us, let us aſk ourſelves ſeriouſly, as in the ſight of God, whether the doctrines we are intending to deliver have a real tendency to make them wiſer and better, to enlighten their minds, purify their hearts, or reform their lives? And if we are conſcious that their tendency is good, let us again aſk ourſelves, whether we are about to utter ſuch powerful and ſtriking ſentiments, as the ſubject will admit of, and as a more careful preparation might have ſuggeſted to us? Have we ſuch an affecting and commanding ſenſe of divine things on our minds, as will awaken and engage the attention of the hearers, efface the worldly impreſſions that have been made on their minds through the week, enter

into their affections, and inſpire them with a contempt of earthly enjoyments, and kindle in them the love, eſteem, and admiration of the things which are heavenly and divine? And as to the general conduct of our lives, let us ſeriouſly aſk ourſelves, Have we done all we ought to have done, might have done, to alleviate, or in ſome caſes to annihilate, and in many caſes entirely prevent, many of the miſeries our people, by tender offices of compaſſion, benevolence and humanity? or have we done all that might have been done by perſons in our circumſtances, and with our abilities, (whatever they are), to propogate a true ſenſe of virtue and religion among mankind? or have we done as much, as has been done this way by thoſe who were in as unfavourable circumſtances, and had not ſuperior abilities? Can we pretend to faithfulneſs in our office, if we do not honeſtly endeavour to do our utmoſt to promote the welfare and happineſs of mankind? or can we reaſonably expect the ſalvation of our ſouls, if we are not faithful to the utmoſt?

2. The ſecond motive is, *That we ſhall ſave the ſouls of them that hear us.* The former motive urges us to take heed to ourſelves and our doctrine for our own ſakes: the latter is of a more generous and diſintereſted kind, recommending it to us to take care of ourſelves and doctrine for the ſake of others. If we feel the force of this double obligation, we ſhall watch over ourſelves with double care and diligence.

As

As no thought can be more terrifying, than that the ſouls of mankind ſhould periſh, through the example of our unholy lives, or through our careleſs or corrupt doctrine; ſo, on the other hand, no conſideration can be more rejoicing and triumphant, than that they ſhould be ſaved by means of that worthy example we ſet before them, and thoſe pure and heavenly leſſons of virtue and piety we honeſtly impart to them. Since the ſoul of man is the moſt excellent piece of the divine workmanſhip in this lower world, ſince it ſurpaſſes far in dignity and excellence the whole fabric of the viſible creation, it muſt undoubtedly be a moſt glorious employment to promote its worth, its welfare, and eternal proſperity. It is impoſſible to conceive a more divine employment, than to maintain a command and power over the minds of men by the force of truth and virtue: for this is in ſome degree to reſemble God himſelf, the author and inſpirer of every good and perfect gift. To be inſtrumental in making reaſon and virtue to prevail in the hearts and lives of mankind, is an office no leſs honourable than that of being a fellow-worker with God in his grand deſign of eſtabliſhing the happineſs of his creation. Beſides the dignity of the work itſelf, let us lift up our thoughts to the everlaſting honour and reward that attends it in the other world: "For they "that be wiſe, ſhall ſhine as the brightneſs of "the firmament; and they that turn many to "righteouſneſs, as the ſtars for ever and ever."

To conclude, let us endeavour, in a humble dependence on the Holy Spirit of God, who favours and ſeconds every worthy deſign, to take ſuch care of ourſelves, and of our doctrine, as that we may have "many to be our crown of "rejoicing at the coming of our Lord Jeſus "Chriſt;" and may at laſt hear that joyful ſentence paſſed upon us, "Well done, good and "faithful ſervants, enter ye into the joy of "your Lord."

I am very ſenſible, that I ought to have acknowledged before this, my own unfitneſs to ſpeak ſo much from this place, and with the air of an inſtructor, before ſo diſcerning an audience, before ſo many Reverend Fathers and Brethren, under whom it would have become me better to ſit as a humble hearer. The taſk was neither my choice, nor deſire, but impoſed upon me. I have endeavoured, according to my ſmall ability, to repreſent a few things concerning the temper and duty of a miniſter of the goſpel, which appeared to me of great importance, and which I find great need to inculcate frequently on my own mind: I ſhall rejoice, greatly rejoice, if I be found to be the only one who has any occaſion to be reminded of them.

HAVING exhorted my Reverend Fathers and Brethren to take heed how they teach, allow me now to call on you the people to take heed how ye hear. We may juſtly invite you to liſten to our inſtructions with an unprejudiced mind, and

and a ſincere intention to know the will of God that ye may do it. To this end hearken to us with humbleneſs of mind, with a deep ſenſe of your want of divine knowledge, or at leaſt of your great need to have the impreſſions of divine things renewed and more deeply engraven on your hearts: hearken to us alſo with a ſtrong ſenſe of your manifold hidden corruptions of heart, or at leaſt of your want of that pitch of purity and ſpiritual-mindedneſs which becomes the followers of Jeſus Chriſt. In this favourable ſtate of mind, lay open your ſouls to the light of divine truth, and to the lively impreſſion of heavenly and eternal objects: ſeriouſly conſider what ye hear, and honeſtly apply it. The main hindrance to your receiving real advantage from ſacred inſtructions, is the want of that ſimplicity and honeſty of heart, which would lead you to conſider every rule of life, every admonition, every enforcement of duty, as ſomething that concerns yourſelves in particular, and may be of uſe to mend your hearts, or better your lives. There is nothing more obſervable among mankind, than a certain careleſs humour of looking upon religious inſtructions, as not belonging to themſelves, but only to the reſt of the world. Perhaps, indeed, they will not entirely diſregard them: poſſibly they may liſten to them with pleaſure, treaſure them up in their memories, ſpeak of them afterwards with ſomething of warmth and emotion, admire the juſtneſs of them, applaud the preacher, and ex-

preſs great ſurpriſe and wonder, that the reſt of mankind do not apply them to correct the diſorders of their hearts, and irregularities of their lives. But they never allow themſelves to reflect, that thoſe very inſtructions which they apply to others, might be highly uſeful to themſelves. Conſider, that it is not enough that you approve of the diſcourſe, and applaud the ſpeaker: applauſe will not ſatisfy a ſincere inſtructor; he requires more ſubſtantial praiſe, your reformation and amendment. What a mortifying diſappointment is it to a faithful teacher, to meet with nothing but empty praiſe from his hearers, when he intended, wiſhed, and expected to have inſpired them with worthy reſolutions, or engaged them in generous undertakings! To conclude: Remember that it will more effectually animate your miniſters in their public miniſtrations, to be aſſured, that there is one perſon in their ſeveral congregations liſtening to them with an earneſt deſire to learn his duty, that he may practiſe it, than to know that all the reſt are applauding them; and that it will rejoice their hearts more, to find that they have been ſo happy as to convey one important inſtruction, or rivet one worthy impreſſion, than to be ſurrounded with the praiſes of the moſt numerous and diſcerning audience.

May the miniſters of the goſpel of Jeſus be taught to teach, and you to hear, in ſuch a manner, that we may be mutual comforts to

one

one another in this present world, and at last meet together in the divine assembly above, to live in immortal friendship with one another, and in eternal communion with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

SER-

SERMON X.

The Lord ſeeth not as Man ſeeth.

By WILLIAM LOTHIAN, V. D. M.

1 SAMUEL xvi. 7.

The Lord ſeeth not as Man ſeeth: for Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

AN important event in the hiſtory of the Jews gave occaſion to theſe words. That people were taken under the particular care and protection of God. He delivered to them a law, preſcribed their form of government, and appointed their kings. Under ſuch a conſtitution, every tranſgreſſion committed by their rulers was immediately puniſhed; and forfeiture of the office, commonly followed any act of diſobedience to the divine command. This was the caſe with Saul, whom God himſelf had choſen to be king over Iſrael. Having "rejected the word of the Lord," the Prophet Samuel was inſtructed to tell him, that he was "rejected from being king;" and received a commiſſion to inveſt another with this high dignity. He was directed to the houſe of Jeſſe, who cauſed ſeven of his ſons to paſs before him: none of whom the prophet was allowed to anoint with oil, and by this accuſtomed ceremony,

ceremony, to point out the perſon deſigned by God to be the chief ruler of his people. David, the youngeſt, who happened at this time to be abſent, was intended to be raiſed to this honour; but being ſent for, the Lord intimated his choice of him: and he was accordingly anointed by Samuel. In the review of Jeſſe's ſons, the prophet was ſtruck with the appearance of Eliab, the eldeſt. His countenance and ſtature, he thought, marked him out for king. Suppoſing that beauty and ſtatelineſs would well ſuit ſo elevated a ſtation; the moment he "looked on Eliab," he concluded, this was "ſurely the Lord's anointed."

The inclination which Samuel diſcovered to prefer Eliab, produces a declaration from God himſelf, containing a truth of great importance, —which I ſhall endeavour to illuſtrate. I ſhall afterwards deduce from it ſome practical reflections: *The Lord ſeeth not as Man ſeeth: for Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.*

We are very apt to entertain a high opinion of our knowledge and penetration. We fancy that we can diſcover, with certainty, the real value of the objects around us, and determine the true character of thoſe with whom we have any correſpondence. No doubt, a natural ſagacity, joined with knowledge of the world, may be of uſe. But there are few who make a juſt eſtimate, or decide with preciſion: and even thoſe who have been moſt accuſtomed to obſervation

ſervation and reflection, are very often miſtaken in their conjectures. How frequently do we err in the judgement we form, and are deceived by ſpecious appearances? How often do our opinions change according as theſe appearances vary, and the principles which we imagined were unerring rules, fail us when applied to particular inſtances?

Let us take *external objects* as an example; and think what impreſſion theſe generally make upon the mind. As Samuel concluded that Eliab was the Lord's anointed, when he looked on the beauty of his countenance, and the height of his ſtature; ſo, outward circumſtances often influence our judgement. What is addreſſed to the ſenſes, catches our attention; and, whilſt it dazzles our eyes, gains our hearts. Do we ſee "a man clothed in purple and fine "linen; faring ſumptuouſly every day;" attended by numbers obſequious to his command, praiſing his virtues and courting his favour? what is the concluſion we commonly make? Surely this muſt be a happy man, who ſeems to have no anxious cares to diſturb his mind; who has no wiſh which he cannot gratify; who is honoured and careſſed by multitudes. Say, ye who are placed in lower ſtations in life, if you are not diſpoſed to envy ſuch a man? *You* labour and toil, and perhaps gain but a ſcanty ſubſiſtence: Wealth, and all the luxuries it procures, flow upon *him* in the greateſt abundance. *You* paſs along unnoticed and unregarded: Where-ever *he* appears,

pears, all are forward to pay him reſpect. *You* are obliged to ſtruggle with various misfortunes, to ſubmit to the violence of the oppreſſors, and to bear the contempt of the proud: *He* muſt be a ſtranger to thoſe innumerable troubles which inſeparably attend *your* humble and deſpiſed condition. Have you never felt, on theſe accounts, the emotions of envy riſe in your breaſts? Has not a ſigh burſt from your heart when the compariſon was made between his ſituation and yours? Have you never thought your happineſs would be complete, were you bleſſed with the ſame advantages? It is from the "*outward appearance*" you thus judge, and from ſo imperfect and partial a view, muſt be often deceived. The pomp of greatneſs, the ſplendour of affluence, the noiſy applauſe of a giddy multitude, or the intereſted flattery of pretended friends, do not conſtitute happineſs. Care often dwells in gilded palaces; reſt forſakes the bed of down; and in midſt of treaſures the heart may be ſad. You are frequently miſtaken in the eſtimate you form of the value of what is external, and cenſure raſhly the conduct of Providence, when, by ſuch unfair compariſons, you are diſcontented with your own ſituation. Could you draw aſide that vail with which the pomp and ſhow attending a ſuperior ſtation, conceals what paſſes within, a very different ſcene would probably preſent itſelf, and exhibit to your view an object deſerving, not your envy, but your pity. You might ſee behind this ſpecious covering, a heart diſturbed

with

with all thoſe uneaſy feelings which pride and vanity excite; diſſatisfied on account of many artificial wants which this very abundance has created; fretting at the ſucceſs of rivals in riches or power; and racked with the diſappointment of ambitious hopes. But there are few who have diſcernment enough to perceive the truth. They look no farther than the outſide, and determine according to external appearance.

In the ſame manner, we generally proceed in judging of *characters*. Here the error is perhaps more natural than in the former inſtance. It is only from mens actions, from their external behaviour, that we are capable of judging. This is the only rule: but neither do we always apply it properly, nor is it, in itſelf, certain and infallible. In juſtice, a man's character ought to be determined, not by one or a few actions, but by the general courſe of his life, and the tenor of his conduct. But what is more common, than to praiſe extravagantly, and eſpecially to condemn ſeverely, from perhaps even one action which has come under our obſervation? The appearance this makes in our eyes, whether favourable or unfavourable, regulates our deciſion. Were we to examine carefully on what grounds we commonly proceed when we entertain a bad opinion of others, we would find that they are often very ſlight and ſuperficial. Even after all the pains we can beſtow, when we have no inclination to decide raſhly, and have no intereſt to biaſs our judgement, many circumſtances may not be taken into the

account, many of which we are ignorant, that notwithſtanding are of importance to a right determination. The real motives, the true deſign, may be concealed. Appearances are deceitful; and as theſe only come under our eye, we muſt frequently make a falſe concluſion. The heart we cannot penetrate, nor obſerve the ſecret ſprings which influence the conduct of others.—Thus we are often miſled by the impreſſion made upon our minds by external objects; and thus it is that *Man ſeeth.*

But God *looketh not on the outward appearance.* What we value and eſteem, may be of no avail in his ſight. Theſe external and temporary diſtinctions which take place among men, are regarded by him with indifference. From him the truth cannot be concealed by thoſe coverings which hide it from mortal eyes. To his unerring wiſdom all things are perfectly known. The real ſtate and condition of every man is always open to his inſpection. He can perceive miſery and wretchedneſs accompanying riches and honours. He can diſcover true contentment and happineſs dwelling in a low and humble ſtation. He diſregards that ſhow and pomp which attract attention, and excite envy; whilſt he values and eſteems that virtue and goodneſs which are exerciſed in obſcurity, and under many diſadvantages with reſpect to outward condition. Contemptible in his ſight is that fancied ſuperiority which circumſtances merely external can beſtow; but honourable in his eſtimation that real diſtinction which ariſes

from the temper and diſpoſition of the ſoul. *He looketh on the heart*; and from thence judgeth of the character. Thoſe ſprings and motives to conduct which often eſcape our obſervation, and, in many caſes, are ſtudiouſly concealed, are naked and open to his penetrating eye. He diſcovers when profeſſions of friendſhip are made in order to deceive; when pretenſions to honeſty are intended to cover the arts of fraud; when a claim is laid to integrity, merely to carry on deſigns of worldly policy; or when the maſk of religion is aſſumed, to gain the good opinion of others, and to promote ſome ſelfiſh and intereſted purpoſe. Hence he is the only *perfect* judge of character, and, by "looking on the heart," is qualified to pronounce that ſentence which will hereafter fix the eternal ſtate of every man.

How ſtriking the contraſt between the imperfect and partial views of men, and the perfect knowledge of God! how wide the difference between the notions *we* form from *looking on the outward appearance*, and the juſt judgement of *God* founded upon his acquaintance with the *heart!* how much will we be confounded at our ignorance and raſhneſs, when that day comes which "will bring to light the "hidden things of darkneſs," and diſcloſe the ſecrets of all hearts!

This view of our imperfection, and of the knowledge of God, may be improved to the purpoſe

purpoſe of teaching us ſome uſeful leſſons. As, in the

Firſt place, Let us learn from hence not to value too highly what is merely external. The ſplendor and ſhow which are addreſſed to the ſenſes, ought not to excite our envy; nor ſhould the means of procuring what unthinking men are ſo apt to eſteem, be the chief objects of our purſuit. Were we to look beyond the *outward appearance*, eſpecially were we capable of looking into the *heart*, we would, in many caſes, make a very different eſtimate. It were well for us, if we ſuitably exerciſed our reaſon, and employed thoſe talents with which we are furniſhed for diſcovering the truth. We would then perceive, that thoſe things we are apt to wiſh for with ſo much eagerneſs, are of much leſs real importance than we at firſt imagine; we would then be convinced, that we were often impoſed upon, and that we purſued the ſhadow inſtead of the ſubſtance; we would acquire a degree of indifference for what was not neceſſarily or intimately connected with our happineſs, that would ſet us free from thoſe immoderate deſires which occaſion ſo much unneaſineſs, would baniſh unſeemly complaints and indecent murmurings againſt the procedure of Providence, would prevent repining at the condition of others, and render us contented with our own ſituation. Let us reflect on the great difference there is betwixt the reality and the appearance. Let us conſider, that external diſtinctions are of no avail in the ſight

of God. Let us remember that the time is faſt approaching, when they will be altogether abolifhed. We will then perceive the folly of allowing what is thus temporary and infignificant to engage our affections. What is man at his beſt eſtate, and when decked out with all thoſe trappings which are ſo apt to catch our fancy? He is like the flower of the field, which, beautiful for a while, attracts the notice of paſſengers; but ſoon its leaves wither, and its beauty evaniſhes. "The wind paſſeth over it, "and it is gone; and the place thereof ſhall "know it no more." How mortifying to human vanity and pride! what an inſtructive leſſon to beware of over-rating what derives all its value from appearance only. In the

Second place, Let us learn to guard againſt raſhly judging our neighbours. *We look at the outward appearance* only, we cannot look on the *heart*. The real motive and principle, the true intention and deſign, we often do not know. Why then ſhould we be haſty to decide, or peremptory in the judgement we form of others characters? What we may view as improper and criminal, might be found, were we acquainted with all the circumſtances, proper and commendable. So ſenſible are mankind of the folly of pronouncing merely upon external appearances, that they are deſirous of avoiding the imputation of ſuch an abſurdity, by magnifying their own ſagacity and penetration. But in doing this, they fall into a greater error. They pretend to diſcover the true motives

tives of the action they condemn, and aſcribe to their neighbour the worſt views and deſigns. They thus uſurp the prerogative of God himſelf; preſuming upon their own wiſdom, they put the moſt unfavourable conſtruction upon their neighbour's conduct; and when their own intereſt is concerned, conclude from the outward appearance, that the heart is corrupted. Hence it happens, that even thoſe actions, which, if traced to their true cauſes and motives, we muſt neceſſarily approve, are cenſured with ſeverity; and what we ourſelves do without ſhame or remorſe, we condemn in others. But "who art thou that judgeſt another man's "ſervant?" what title haſt thou to dive into the heart, or to decide where thou muſt neceſſarily be ignorant of many circumſtances proper to be known in order to form a right opinion? Wouldſt thou chuſe to have your own conduct tried in this manner, or your character determined by ſuch partial views? He whom thou thus raſhly condemneſt, has a maſter in heaven, "who looketh on the heart. "To his own maſter he muſt ſtand or fall." Before this perfect Judge of character, thou thyſelf muſt one day appear, and give an account of your conduct. "Judge not, therefore, leſt "ye be judged." Attend to your own temper and behaviour; amend what is amiſs there; and be not too haſty to decide concerning the characters of others.

3*dly*, If "God looketh not on the outward "appearance, but looketh on the heart," let

us be careful to cultivate that temper, and to acquire thoſe diſpoſitions, which he will approve. Our external circumſtances will not recommend us to his favour. The rich and the poor are equally the objects of his regard, if they act aright the part aſſigned them in that ſtation of life he has appointed. Whatever may be our outward condition, we cannot enjoy the countenance of God, nor expect his approbation hereafter, unleſs we practiſe the virtues which he has enjoined. Theſe are the only ornaments in his ſight: theſe conſtitute the only diſtinction which he regards. Men may court and flatter, when this perfect Judge will condemn: Men, who are influenced chiefly by appearances, may commend, when that God "who looked on the heart," will diſapprove.—In the

Fourth place, The ſame conſideration ſhould teach us to be neither too much elated with the applauſe, nor too much dejected with the cenſure of men. Both of them are often beſtowed where they are not deſerved. What ſignifies their commendation, on the one hand, when we are conſcious of having no title to it; or their reproach, on the other, if our own hearts do not condemn us? The one ought not to give us any ſatisfaction, nor the other pain. How fooliſh muſt it be to act contrary to what we know is our duty, either to gain the praiſe or to avoid the cenſure of thoſe who "look no further than the outward appear-"ance?" yet how many are there who make

this

this their chief object, and for the ſake of it, ſacrifice every worthy principle? What "a "ſmall matter ought we to reckon being judged "by man's judgement, when we recollect that "there is one that judgeth us, even God?" How mortifying to pride, and this unbounded thirſt of praiſe, to reflect, that notwithſtanding the noiſy applauſe of thouſands, this impartial Judge condemns? On the other hand, how comfortable the thought, that if we do our duty, and notwithſtanding meet with cenſure and contempt from men, God at preſent approves, and hereafter will abundantly reward our conduct?

Laſtly, Let us learn from this repreſentation the folly and danger of hypocriſy. By art and cunning, we may deceive men, who "look at the outward appearance only;" but we cannot by any artifice deceive that "God "who looketh on the heart." He demands truth in the inward parts, and delights in integrity, and uprightneſs of ſoul. Theſe we muſt *ſeem* at leaſt to have, in order to gain the favour of men. It is not always eaſy for them, however, to diſcover if we are really poſſeſſed of theſe virtues; but "God ſearcheth the "heart, and trieth the reins. There is not a "word on our tongue, there is not a thought "in our heart, but he knoweth it altogether." How fooliſh then muſt it be to diſſemble, when we are ever in the preſence of that great Being, whoſe eyes penetrate the inmoſt receſſes of our ſouls? How dangerous, how ineffectual the at-

tempt

tempt to impoſe upon this unerring Judge? "Whither can we go from his Spirit, or flee "from his preſence? He knows our down-"ſitting and our upriſing; he underſtands "our thoughts afar off: he compaſſeth our "path, and is acquainted with all our ways. "Darkneſs cannot hide us from God; to him "the night ſhineth as the day; to him the "darkneſs and the light are both alike." Suppoſe we ſhould ſucceed for a time by a double and deceitful conduct; yet what will this ſucceſs avail, when that God who was preſent with us in our cloſeſt retirements, ſhall call us to an account? The period is faſt approaching, when our character will be determined, and our eternal ſtate fixed, not according to the opinion which men have formed of us, but according to our deeds. Let the view then of this righteous judgement of God, induce us to act with integrity and uprightneſs, without which, we cannot hope for the approbation of that Being, *who ſeeth not as man ſeeth; who looketh not on the outward appearance, but who looketh on the heart.*

SER-

SERMON XI.

Reflections on Jesus weeping.

By WILLIAM LOTHIAN, V. D. M.

JOHN xi. 35.

Jesus wept.

THE history of which these words are a part, exhibits a very tender and affecting scene. Our Lord had lived in intimacy and friendship with Lazarus of Bethany, and his two sisters, Martha and Mary: and they repaid this mark of distinction by every expression of civility and kindness. Lazarus falling sick, his sisters sent notice of it to Jesus, who was then at some distance; not doubting of his sympathy for them in this distress; and entertaining the hope, that the same power and goodness which they had seen him exercise in other instances, would interpose in behalf of their brother. Jesus, instead of hastening to the relief of his friend, as was very naturally expected by Martha and Mary, continued where he was; and in the mean time Lazarus dies. We may easily conceive the deep affliction of his sisters. Surprised no doubt they were at being neglected, as they thought, by that Jesus whose character was distinguished by acts of kindness, and on whose affection they

they imagined they might depend. It is difficult to ſay what ſentiments they would entertain of his conduct on this occaſion, which might very probably excite ſuſpicions in minds like theirs, oppreſſed with trouble, and fretted with diſappointment. So afflicting was their ſituation, that "many of the Jews came to "comfort them," and to adminiſter every conſolation in their power to two ſuch worthy perſons. But our Lord's intentions were as friendly as they could have wiſhed. So far from being unmindful of their diſtreſs, he returned to Judea, where his own life was in danger, and, notwithſtanding the remonſtrances of his diſciples, proceeds to Bethany. When the news of his approach reached the town, the hopes of Martha revived. She ran out to meet him; and, with that earneſtneſs which marked the ſtate of her mind, and expreſſed ſome degree of confidence, though clouded with doubt and fear, inſtantly ſays, "Lord, if thou hadſt been "here, my brother had not died." Jeſus embraced this opportunity of giving a diſtant hint of his deſign: "I am the reſurrection and the "life: he that believeth on me, though he "were dead, yet ſhall he live." Martha communicated the glad news, that the Maſter was come, to Mary; who immediately left the houſe, and, followed by the Jews, ran to the place where he was, fell down at his feet, and feeling the ſame emotions with Martha when ſhe firſt ſaw him, addreſſed him in the ſame language, "Lord, if thou hadſt been here, my

"brother

"brother had not died." Two sisters lamenting the death of a beloved brother; their companions deeply affected with their distress; and all of them bathed in tears of undissembled sorrow, placed before our Lord a truly mournful spectacle. He entered warmly into all those sentiments which filled their hearts with grief; felt for their sufferings, and mingled his tears with theirs: *Jesus wept.* These were tears of sympathy and love: they flowed from those eyes which never beheld distress without pity; and were the genuine expression of that sorrow which wrung a heart tender and affectionate. Happy were the sisters of Lazarus in such a friend: His sympathy alone would afford some consolation to their dejected spirits; and though no hope had remained of any farther proof of his love, must have, in some measure, soothed their troubled minds.

Jesus weeping with his friends at this time, will suggest some reflections, which it may be of use to illustrate. Every view indeed of his character, almost every action of his life, conveys to us instruction. If we entertain that opinion of him which we ought, we will take a pleasure in examining every circumstance in both, however minute, which may contribute to inspire something of the same temper and disposition which we must admire in the person we acknowledge as our master.

I. "Jesus wept when he saw Mary and the "Jews who came with her weeping." Does not

not this circumſtance preſent us with a very amiable and endearing view of his character? It ſets the Saviour of the world before us in a very engaging point of light. Here we behold him who for our ſakes aſſumed the human nature, acquainted with our grief, and affected with our ſorrow. We ſee his tears ſhed at the ſight of thoſe troubles to which our preſent imperfect ſtate is ſubject. Here we obſerve the moſt illuſtrious perſon that ever appeared on our earth, entering into our feelings, and diſcovering the ſame painful emotions that oppreſs our minds. On this occaſion we behold him whom heaven and earth obeyed, condeſcending to take part with us in our diſtreſs, and in our affliction, afflicted. Martha and Mary had loſt a companion and a brother. The remembrance of his virtues; the recollection of the happineſs they had enjoyed in his ſociety, and in the mutual endearments of a virtuous friendſhip; the hope they had entertained of ſuch a friend, giving a double reliſh to the pleaſures of life, or lightening the burden of woe in the hour of adverſity, but now diſappointed; would all ſerve to aggravate and increaſe their ſorrow.

There are implanted in the ſoul certain affections which have *others* for their object. By theſe we ſubſtitute them in our place; conſider their intereſts as our own, and feel ſorrow for their diſtreſs. Such was that affection which now reigned in the breaſt of Jeſus. His ſorrow did

not ariſe wholly from the ſame cauſes which grieved the ſiſters of Lazarus. They mourned the death of a brother. Jeſus knew what they ſuffered: he felt for them. Sympathy, compaſſion, and pity, took poſſeſſion of his ſoul.

Theſe are virtues which are the brighteſt ornaments of any character, and deſervedly obtain eſteem and regard. Is there a perſon who can turn away his eyes from beholding diſtreſs, or who can look unmoved on another's pains? We pronounce that he is deſtitute of humanity, and unworthy the name of man: we conclude, that he has counteracted the moſt worthy diſpoſitions of the heart, and done violence to his very nature. We deteſt his conduct; we cannot think of him, but with abhorrence. But who is the man whoſe heart bleeds at a tale of woe, whoſe ſoul melts with tender ſympathy, and deeply feels a brother's ſufferings? We behold him with veneration and love.

It was this tenderneſs and compaſſion our Lord diſcovered. The pitying tear ſhowed what paſſed within his breaſt. Often had he exerciſed his power in acts of ſingular goodneſs: often had theſe excited admiration and love. They diſplayed the Son of God, and impreſſed wonder and aſtoniſhment on the minds of the ſpectators. But ſcarcely did any occaſion exhibit him in a more engaging view than the preſent. Attended by two mourning ſiſters, ſurrounded by their companions weeping, "*Jeſus wept.*" With a tenderneſs and pity becoming the Son of man, with a ſympathy

and compaſſion which marked the friend of the human race, he laid aſide the more dazzling glories of his character, and mingled his tears with thoſe of his friends.—What would be the ſentiments of Mary and her companions when they ſaw the Saviour of the world thus ſharing with them in their ſorrows? Obſerving that they were neither unregarded nor unpitied, ſome conſolation would ſpring up in their dejected minds; and, ſtruck with the tears of Jeſus, would for a while forget their trouble, in amazement and admiration of his kindneſs. Before this, Martha and Mary had acknowledged the excellence of his character, and entertained for him the higheſt reſpect; but if any action of his life could recommend him particularly to their eſteem, it muſt have been the ſympathy he now diſcovered, and the part he took in their diſtreſſes.

Have we ever ſeen a like exerciſe of this virtue? Have we ever witneſſed ſcenes of woe, where every effort of friendſhip was unavailing, and nothing left but to drop the tear of ſympathy, when the power to afford relief was wanting? Have we not beheld this teſtimony of a feeling heart with reverence? Shall not a like impreſſion be made upon our minds, when we here ſee Jeſus weeping with his mourning friends? Shall we venerate theſe proofs of excellence in human characters, and ſhall we not be affected in the ſame manner, when we think of this compaſſionate Friend of man? Let this circumſtance then have its ſuitable influence;

let

let it endear him to our thoughts, and excite in our souls that high regard and sincere esteem to which he is justly intitled.

II. In the second place, Jesus wept with his friends when in distress. In this he has set us an example worthy of our imitation. As his tears were the genuine expression of sympathy and compassion; so he has powerfully recommended these virtues by his conduct.

Some have endeavoured to exclude altogether these affections; and others have represented them as a weakness which ought not to be encouraged. It has been said, that whatever we may pretend, we have no such kindly affections for others; but that the feeling we call compassion, is as selfish and interested as any other, being nothing else but the apprehension of some calamity to ourselves, raised by observing what others suffer. This, however, is an unfair state of the case. There are few who have not, on some occasions, felt a real sorrow for their fellow-creatures, entirely independent either of the reflection that they were, at the time, free from the like distress, or of the fear of the like trouble befalling themselves. Hard indeed is that heart which never felt for any woes but its own, and never knew sympathy and pity unless accompanied with such selfish considerations. Neither are these affections given us in vain. As they are a part of our original constitution, they answer many valuable purposes. By this means, misery may

be relieved; and, in ſome caſes, prevented. Hence they ſerve to diminiſh the calamities, and to increaſe the pleaſures, of life. Abſurd is the opinion that they deſerve not our regard. Cruel is the attempt to baniſh them from our breaſts.

Our bleſſed Saviour has ſhown us an example of a different conduct. In his ſoul, tenderneſs and pity were deeply rooted. When he obſerved Mary and her companions weeping, the emotions of ſympathy were excited; and, inſtead of his ſuppreſſing them, the tear ſtarted in his eye, expreſſive of the feelings of his tender heart. It was not for *himſelf*, it was for his *friends* he wept. Shall we not then conſider his behaviour as a pattern for ours, and be proud to imitate ſo amiable a part of his character? Neither the religion, nor the example of Jeſus, gives any countenance to the abſurd attempt of rooting out our paſſions; nor encourages us to "ſhut up our bowels of "compaſſion." As *men*, we ought to feel for the diſtreſſes of others; and Chriſtianity does not require that we ſtifle or ſuppreſs the emotions which their ſufferings raiſe in our ſouls. Formed as we are, we muſt be affected; and our profeſſion as Chriſtians, binds us to compaſſion and pity, not merely by poſitive precept, but likewiſe by the example of our divine Maſter.

What is more engaging to a mind not utterly corrupted, than the exerciſe of compaſſion? What is a more agreeable ſpectacle, than

than to behold thoſe who partake of the ſame nature, who equally feel pain and diſtreſs, and who are all equally liable to trouble, bearing towards each other a tender ſympathy? The more we diſcover of this temper in any perſon, the more we eſteem his character; and ſo uniform are the ſentiments of mankind in this reſpect, that they have agreed to mark its propriety and excellence by the name of *Humanity*.

Beſides, the exerciſe of kindly affections is ever attended with a degree of pleaſure. So carefully has the Author of our nature provided for the practice of compaſſion, that objects of diſtreſs, by a ſecret charm, attract our notice. By a wonderful contrivance in our internal frame, it is not always in our power to turn away our eyes from beholding our neighbour's ſufferings, or to ſhut our hearts againſt taking a part in his ſorrows. The ſight of woe touches our ſoul; and though we cannot remove trouble, yet we are ſtrongly prompted by our very conſtitution, to alleviate it by our ſympathy.

But were we ever inclined to counteract theſe natural diſpoſitions; were we ever induced to check the riſing emotions of pity; let us reflect on the conduct of our bleſſed Saviour. Behold him weeping with Mary and her companions; think how he appeared when he ſaw their diſtreſs; and ſay, if you ſhould not be influenced by ſo bright an example. Is it not your trueſt honour; ought it not to be your

higheſt ambition, to reſemble this illuſtrious pattern of all excellence? Did Jeſus weep? and ſhall you refuſe to ſhed a tear at a brother's diſtreſs? Did he diſcover the tendereſt compaſſion for thoſe who were afflicted? ſhall you be indifferent to another's ſufferings? Should you not rather wiſh to catch ſomething of the ſame amiable ſpirit and temper? Imitate then this divine example: yield to the kindly feelings of your own hearts; and from Jeſus learn "to "weep with thoſe that weep."

III. Jeſus weeping with his friends, exhibits a picture of our preſent ſtate, and repreſents it as affording many cauſes of trouble and ſorrow. On a former occaſion, our Lord was kindly entertained at the houſe of Lazarus; and at that time was employed in communicating inſtruction to this pious family. Now, he finds it "the houſe "of mourning;" and his buſineſs is to comfort Martha and Mary under the loſs of a beloved brother. Formerly, Mary ſat at his feet, liſtening with the utmoſt attention to every word he uttered. Now, ſhe lies proſtrate before him bathed in tears.

So variable and inconſtant are all human affairs; ſo uncertain and precarious is every earthly bleſſing. To-day, we may be happy in the enjoyment of our friends, and the ſociety of thoſe we love; to-morrow, we may be deprived of theſe comforts by the unrelenting hand of death ſnatching from our ſight the moſt natural and worthy objects of our affection.

tion. To-day, we may be called to "rejoice "with those who rejoice;" to-morrow, a sudden and unexpected change happens, and our kind offices are required in administering consolation to the wounded spirit. If such, then, is our present condition, let us not only be ready, in imitation of our Lord's example, to show our compassion and sympathy, but let us prepare our minds for bearing, in a proper manner, those distresses which it will not be in our power to prevent. The calamities of life will, in some measure, affect us, and perhaps none more deeply than the loss of friends; but whilst we feel as *Men*, let us act as *Christians*. Nature may shed a tear over the parting scene. Jesus wept over the grave of Lazarus. But Religion sets bounds to our grief, and requires that we "mourn not as those who are with-"out hope." She reminds us, that nothing here below is certain and permanent: she calls upon us, "to look not at the things which are "seen, and temporal, but at those things which "are unseen and eternal;" and has opened to our view another and a better state, to disengage our affections from this world, and to support us under all its troubles. Let us then remember, that our present state is a state of trial and of discipline. When distress comes upon us, let us have recourse to the principles which True Religion has recommended, and these hopes she has encouraged us to entertain. In this world we will meet with trouble: here, sympathy and compassion ought to be exercised.

ſed. But let us not forget that better country to which we are travelling: and when our ſouls are pierced through with many ſorrows, let us raiſe our thoughts to heaven; let us look forward to that perfect ſtate, "where former "things ſhall be paſſed away; where God "ſhall wipe the tear from every eye; where "there ſhall be no more death, nor ſorrow, "nor crying; neither ſhall there be any more "pain."

IV. JESUS weeping on this occaſion, was conſidered as a proof of his love for Lazarus. Such was the natural and juſt concluſion of the Jews who were preſent: "Behold," ſaid they, "how he loved him." The tears which our Lord ſhed, were an evidence, not only of the tenderneſs of his heart, but likewiſe of the ſincerity of his affection. If his ſympathy with Mary and the other mourners, ought to excite our eſteem for his character, the affection he diſcovered, ought to warm our hearts, and to produce love to this compaſſionate Friend of man. Let us recollect, that this was not the only inſtance in which he ſhowed, in the very ſame manner, his diſintereſted benevolence. When he was on his laſt journey toward Jeruſalem, multitudes followed him; in token of their reſpect ſpread their garments on the way as he paſſed, and celebrated his praiſes with ſinging Hoſannas to the Son of David. But, amidſt all this pomp and ſeeming honour, his mind was ſorrowful and dejected. Surveying

what

what was afterwards to happen, as he approached, the tears ſtarted in his eye; and he weeped over this unhappy city. The ſins of its inhabitants, and the view of that vengeance which was ſoon to be inflicted, not the proſpect of his own ſufferings, though at the very time they were near, produced this expreſſion of his ſorrow. Did then this kind Friend weep? was his affection for man ſo ſincere? and ſhall we not teſtify the ſenſe we have of his kindneſs by our love? How warm and fervent ought this love to be, when we think, that he not only wept over our miſeries, but ſhed his blood for our ſakes! Cold and unfeeling indeed is that heart, which can remain unaffected with the contemplation of the character and conduct of Jeſus.

I CONCLUDE with a reflection ſuggeſted by a review of what has been already obſerved. What an encouragement is it to recollect, that this ſame Jeſus, whom we here ſee weeping at our diſtreſſes, is ſtill employed in attending to our intereſt! He is now our Advocate with God. "Becauſe the children are partakers of fleſh "and blood, he alſo took part of the ſame; "and now exalted to the right hand of the "Majeſty on high, ever liveth to make inter-"ceſſion." How comfortable the thought, that as "he himſelf once ſuffered, being tempt-"ed, ſo he is ſtill touched with a feeling of "our infirmities!" Ought not theſe circumſtances to raiſe his character in our eſtimation,

and

and to ſecure for him the chief place in our hearts? This reflection may be farther extended. If any thing can ſerve to inſpire us with joy, it is the conſideration, that this Jeſus, whom we here view in ſo amiable and endearing a light, will hereafter be our Judge. How tranſporting to the pious and ſincere, the thought, that the perſon to whom he muſt give an account of his conduct, and who is appointed to pronounce that ſentence which will fix his ſtate for ever, is not ſevere and unrelenting; but one who has already given the moſt convincing proofs of tenderneſs, compaſſion, and love for mankind!

Recollecting then thoſe parts of the character and conduct of Jeſus, which ſhow him to be the kind Friend of man, let us entertain for him the ſincereſt eſteem; and preſerve our confidence in him firm and unſhaken. Let us make the beſt return in our power for his kindneſs; and by every method we can, expreſs our affection for him, who, for our ſakes "became "a man of ſorrows, and acquainted with "grief;" and who in all our afflictions was afflicted.

SER-

SERMON XII.

The Wisdom of God in the Gospel-Revelation.

By WILLIAM LEECHMAN, D. D.

Preached at the opening of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in May 1758.

1 COR. i. 21.

For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

WE learn from this chapter, and several other places of the New Testament, that the Jews and Gentiles urged different objections against Christianity, arising from their respective characters and prejudices. The learned among the Gentiles (to whom the apostle's discourse here refers) entertained very lofty notions of the excellency of their philosophy, and of the noble effects it was capable of producing. According to their views, it was the only corrector of ignorance and vice, and the only conductor to truth and virtue: it alone formed great and good men: it afforded the only true means of enlightening and reforming

forming the world. In their opinion, it was excellent, not only upon account of the matter, but alſo of the manner. They admired the accuracy and ſtrength of its reaſonings, and the beauty and elegance of the expreſſions. On theſe accounts, they beſtowed on it the honourable appellation of *wiſdom*; and from the force of theſe prejudices in favour of it, they accounted the goſpel fooliſhneſs, becauſe unlike to it in all reſpects.

The method which the goſpel propoſed, of inſtructing and reforming the world by faith, and not by philoſophical theories, by illiterate fiſhermen and not by learned philoſophers, was in their view a very fooliſh one, and which muſt in the event prove unſucceſsful. They deſpiſed too the plain and artleſs ſimplicity of the ſtyle of the goſpel, when compared with their laboured compoſitions and ſtudied eloquence. The apoſtle, aſſuming it as a certain principle, that the true knowledge of God was the beſt foundation on which real religion and virtue, and the moſt valuable reformation and improvements among mankind, could be built, replies to the objections of the Gentiles in the words of the text: *For after that, in the wiſdom of God,* (*i. e.* in the myſterious counſels of the Divine will), *the world by wiſdom* (*i. e.* by their own reaſon and philoſophy) *knew not God, it pleaſed God by the fooliſhneſs of preaching to ſave them that believe.*

In which words there are two main aſſertions: *Firſt*, That the much-admired wiſdom

of the philoſophers failed in a very eſſential point, the leading the world to the true knowledge of God.

Secondly, That the doctrine of the goſpel, which they contemned, is ordained in the wiſdom of God to be the effectual means of enlightening and ſaving thoſe who believe it.

All that is further intended at preſent is, to offer ſome obſervations for the illuſtration or confirmation of the apoſtle's two aſſertions; and then, if time will allow, to point out ſome of the practical inſtructions (ſuited to the occaſion of our meeting) ariſing from what ſhall be ſaid.

I. The First aſſertion is, That *the world by wiſdom knew not God.*

As the apoſtle was a man of unqueſtionable integrity, and had the beſt opportunities of being fully acquainted with the ſtate of the Heathen world, his teſtimony, as to this charge of ignorance, againſt it, might ſafely be relied upon. But there is no need of reſting the evidence of it upon his teſtimony, however venerable and worthy of credit in all reſpects. Every one who is acquainted with the hiſtory of the ancient world, muſt acknowledge, that for many ages before Chriſt it affords the moſt inconteſtable proofs from fact, that the great body of mankind had not that true knowledge of God which did or could direct them to purity either of manners or of worſhip. It is true, that the greateſt part of the philoſophers

acknowledged one ſupreme God; but they taught at the ſame time, and with the ſame ſincerity, the doctrine of many ſubordinate deities, to whom worſhip was to be given; and, which is ſtill worſe, ſome of theſe inferior gods, in the opinion of the people, and even of ſome of the philoſophers themſelves, were of the moſt wicked and immoral characters imaginable. Some of them were lewd and intemperate, others were envious and malignant, or fierce and cruel, real *demons* in the worſt ſenſe of the word. This diſtinction of good and evil deities, was acknowledged in all Heathen nations; and the bad ones were worſhipped, not only with rites, but with actions, correſpondent to their characters. Hence not only prayers to kindle the fire of impure love, but proſtitutions were authoriſed acts of religion in honour of certain deities. Hence the barbarous combats of gladiators, to appeaſe the ghoſts of the deceaſed, and human ſacrifices to render the gods of cruel diſpoſitions propitious. Hence too the prevailing practice of magical rites and ceremonies, and ſome of them of the moſt horrid and ſhocking kind, by which the worſhippers of the *Genii* and *Demons* pretended to maintain communion with them, and even to have the power of compelling them to do whatever they deſired. There is abundant evidence from ancient hiſtory, that not only the vulgar, but learned philoſophers, and great emperors, were addicted, almoſt to madneſs, to theſe abſurd or abominable magical charms and operations.

tions. Thus vice was recommended to the imitation of the worſhippers by the immoral characters of the gods, and the foundations of Polytheiſm and idolatry were laid upon philoſophical principles. It was the natural conſequence of this ſtate of things, that a Supreme Deity, though acknowledged in ſpeculation, would not be regarded and glorified as God, either in common life, or in the exerciſes of religion. The homage and devotion due to him was intercepted by the perpetual attention to the ſurpriſing variety of ſacrifices and other ſacred rites preſcribed to be performed to vaſt multitudes of falſe and imaginary deities. And in all theſe numberleſs acts of worſhip to them, there was little of any ultimate reference to the Supreme Deity injoined in their theological or philoſophical theories, and in the common practice there was none at all: ſo that the ſovereign God, though acknowledged in theory, was entirely forgotten, and neglected, in the forms of religion. To which it may be added, that the conceptions the generality of the Heathen world had formed of the character and moral government of the Supreme Deity, were ſo erroneous or defective, or ſo unſettled and fluctuating, that they could not have any ſteady effect to promote virtuous practice in the common train of life, or to adminiſter ſolid conſolation in the ſeaſons of diſtreſs, or in the hour of death.

In juſtice to the Heathen world, it muſt be owned, that many of the philoſophers, and

men of education, diſcerned the immorality and abſurdity of the fabulous ſtories of the poets concerning the gods, condemned the literal ſenſe of them as falſe and impious, and earneſtly wiſhed that ſome reformation had been made on the eſtabliſhed religion as to theſe points: but, at the ſame time, they maintained the eſſential principles of Polytheiſm, on which the whole ſyſtem of idolatry and ſuperſtition was founded. A few particular philoſophers, or perhaps the whole ſect of the Epicureans, threw off entirely the common doctrines of Polytheiſm, and ran into the contrary extreme of Atheiſm and impiety. But all theſe philoſophers, who retained any grave and ſerious ſenſe of things, uniformly taught the doctrine of ſubordinate deities, and of the worſhip due to them. If the time allotted for this diſcourſe, or the nature of it, would permit us to take a ſurvey of the philoſophers from their firſt appearance in Greece, about five hundred years before our Saviour, till their reputation and influence entirely ſunk about five hundred years after him, it might be ſhown, that during the whole courſe of that long period, they were ſo far from correcting the genius and ſpirit of Paganiſm, that they rather encouraged and promoted it both by their principles and practice. And particularly it would appear, that after Chriſtianity began viſibly to gain ground on the ancient religion, the philoſophers were the moſt zealous protectors of it, even to the degree of bigotry, and violent

violent perſecution of all who oppoſed it. So that the apoſtle's aſſertion, that *the world by wiſdom knew not God*, holds true, not only as to the vulgar, but as to the learned philoſophers themſelves. Some learned men have endeavoured to prove, that the unity of God was taught, and the errors of Polytheiſm were detected, in thoſe ſacred myſteries of the Heathens, into which ſelect perſons only were initiated. Though this ſhould be ſuppoſed to be true, it will not invalidate the apoſtle's aſſertion, that *the world by wiſdom knew not God*. For it muſt be acknowledged, that it cannot be much to the honour of the inſtitutors or directors of the myſterious rites, to ſhut out the greateſt part of mankind from the knowledge of the moſt important truths, and to communicate it only to a few, under the ſeal of the moſt impenetrable ſecrecy. It certainly diſcovers a more benevolent, a more diſintereſted, and noble ſpirit, in the founders of the Jewiſh and Chriſtian religion, to promulgate the truth to all mankind. But whether the unity of deity was taught in the myſteries at all, or, at leaſt, whether it was taught in any other ſenſe than was generally done by the philoſophers, may be doubted. For it is highly improbable, that the errors of Polytheiſm, or, at leaſt, all the errors of Polytheiſm, were detected in theſe ſacred rites. That the initiated perſevered in the belief and in the worſhip of a plurality of gods, ſeems to be manifeſt beyond all grounds of doubt. It is a moſt un-

deniable fact, that a ſect of philoſophers *, numerous, powerful, and flouriſhing for ſeveral centuries, who were great admirers of the myſteries, and moſt zealous to be admitted into them, were at the ſame time the warmeſt ſupporters of Polytheiſm, and all its attendant ſuperſtitions.

It is not intended, in what has been ſaid, to depreciate the whole ancient philoſophy, but only to ſhow, that the apoſtle's aſſertion is confirmed by undoubted facts. It is but juſt to own, that the writings of the philoſophers contain many excellent truths and fine ſentiments, and precepts, both of the moral and devout kind, which are very worthy of the ſerious attention and peruſal of Chriſtians. It is matter of juſt regret, that there was no proper method of propagating theſe pious and moral inſtructions among the people in Heathen countries; and that, though there had been, they could not have had much influence upon their minds, engroſſed, darkened, and corrupted with the loweſt and moſt abominable ſuperſtitions. It may be juſtly doubted, if even the † men of learning

* Latter Platoniſts. Julian the Emperor, though an adorer of the myſteries, according to the teſtimony of a Heathen hiſtorian, an admirer of his character, continued to believe in as many gods as the poets had deſcribed.

† It is obſerved of the Emperor Julian, (commonly called the *Apoſtate*), that though he was celebrated for perſonal chaſtity and ſeverity of manners; yet he kept ſwarms of proſtitutes and debauchees publicly about his court, and even near his perſon, in the time of public ceremonies. There

learning and education were able to protect themſelves from the corrupting influence of the low and immoral characters of the gods whom they thought themſelves bound to worſhip.

It may be further conſidered as a ſtrong preſumption of the truth of the apoſtle's aſſertion, that as thoſe of mankind before Chriſt who were left to their own wiſdom, did not attain to the true knowledge of God; in like manner, thoſe who have derived no light from him ſince that time, have been and are ſtill in the ſame ſtate of darkneſs, as to this great foundation of all religious knowledge. Our bleſſed Saviour declared, Matth. xi. 27. "That "no man knoweth the Father but the Son, "and he to whomſoever the Son will reveal "him." This may be conſidered as a prediction; and in this view it has been ſufficiently verified by the event. It cannot be ſhown, that, during all the long period ſince the firſt appearance of Chriſtianity, any one kingdom, great or ſmall, any one city, village, or community, has attained to juſt notions of the divine perfections, to comfortable views of divine providence, to purity of worſhip, to a perfect ſyſtem of morals, or to ſteady hopes of immortality, without the aid of goſpel-light. Surely the experience of near four thouſand

There has been no other account given of this inconſiſtency, but that he thought himſelf obliged to ſhew them reſpect, and do them honour, as perſons conſecrated to the goddeſs Venus, and other deities of the like character.

years,

years, muſt be admitted as a ſatisfactory proof, if not of the inſufficiency, at leaſt of the unſucceſsfulneſs of human reaſon in matters of religion.

As to the abſtract queſtions, How far the powers of the human mind could go in finding out the truths of religion; either how far one man, who exerciſes his reaſon to the beſt advantage, could go; or how far the joint inquiries of a ſociety of men, taking the advantage of the obſervations and diſcoveries of their predeceſſors, could carry their reſearches? it is very difficult, and no way material, to reſolve them. The only queſtion of real importance is concerning the fact, namely, Whether, notwithſtanding the vaſt powers of the human mind, diſcovered by great improvements made in many beneficial branches of knowledge, ſuch as geometry, aſtronomy, legiſlation, morals, and arts, yet mankind did not ſtill continue in ſuch a deplorable ſtate of darkneſs with regard to religious knowledge, as rendered the revelation of the goſpel abſolutely neceſſary to accompliſh the gracious deſigns of Providence, and as affords the higheſt ground of thankfulneſs for Jeſus Chriſt, the unſpeakable gift of God? Every candid perſon who is acquainted with the ſtate of religion in the Heathen world, even in its moſt enlightened times, will be at no loſs how to anſwer this queſtion.

It is not intended to enter into the examination of the ſpeculative queſtion, How far the light of nature can go? It may not perhaps be improper,

improper, to offer ſome general obſervations relating to it.

In the firſt place, let it be obſerved, that we cannot certainly conclude, from what the philoſophers have actually taught, that ſo far the unaided light of reaſon has gone; becauſe we find ſome of the oldeſt and beſt philoſophers acknowledging, that they did not inveſtigate ſome of their moſt important doctrines, but received them from ancient traditions. It may further deſerve our attention, that theſe firſt ſages, who were not ſo puffed up with conceited notions of the power of their own reaſon, as to reject all traditionary opinions, ſpoke frequently more juſtly and more worthily of Deity and Providence, and with leſs heſitation of a future ſtate, than their ſucceſſors, whoſe pride of underſtanding made them depend ſolely on the ſtrength of their own reaſoning.

It is ſtill further obſervable, that we find theſe more ancient philoſophers expreſſing ſometimes, in very pathetical terms, a deep ſenſe of the uncertainty of their own reaſonings, and of their need of a better guide. Nay, ſometimes they diſcover ardent wiſhes at leaſt, if not ſome faint expectations, of a divine inſtructor. Theſe things are ſtrong preſumptions, that ſome of the beſt doctrines of ancient philoſophy, were rather derived from old traditions which were long held venerable, than found out by philoſophical diſquiſitions.

Again, let us further conſider, that it is no eaſy

eaſy matter, to us who dwell in the midſt of light, even to form a conception of the obſcurity, confuſion, and uncertainty, which may have perplexed the thoughts of the moſt knowing men in the ages of darkneſs. When we reflect upon the diſadvantages of their ſituation, we may ſee ground to conclude, that it required greater efforts of reaſoning than we are apt upon firſt thoughts to imagine, to aſcertain even ſome points which are commonly looked upon as very obvious. For inſtance, the great fundamental doctrine of the unity of God is commonly conſidered as extremely plain and evident, even from reaſon. But to judge with more fairneſs of the obviouſneſs of the evidence for it, let us candidly attend to the arguments which the moſt approved modern reaſoners employ to eſtabliſh it. They uſe two ſorts of arguments, namely, metaphyſical ones, and others taken from the unity of deſign every where apparent in the conſtitution of the univerſe, and in the ſtructure of particular beings. The firſt kind of arguments, it will be admitted, are too abſtracted and refined to produce a firm conviction, or indeed any conviction at all, in the minds of the generality of mankind; and the ſecond ſort of them could not have any great or general effect in the earlier ages of the world, before philoſophy was cultivated, and the ſyſtem of the univerſe inquired into. And even after philoſophy is advanced to a conſiderable degree of perfection, few enter ſo deeply into philoſophical

philosophical discoveries as to feel the whole force of arguments drawn from them. Perhaps one would not err much who should assert, that the belief of one Supreme Deity, so far as it did prevail in the Heathen world, was rather owing to some ancient traditions on the point, or to a supposed resemblance betwixt human governments and the government of the universe, than to any solid and convincing arguments drawn from the depths of philosophy. It might in like manner be shown, after all that philosophy in its highest state of improvement has been able to suggest in proof of other points of the utmost importance, better and more satisfactory evidence, and more adapted to the capacity and situation of the greatest part of mankind, are still wanting, and earnestly wished for, by every one who retains a serious and devout sense of his present state of darkness, imperfection, and mortality.—— That we may see whether the gospel affords any grounds of satisfaction, with regard to points of great importance to the peace of the human mind, or any grounds more level to every capacity, let us proceed to consider the apostle's second assertion in the text.

II. We now proceed to the Second assertion of the apostle in the text: *It pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.* This assertion implies principally three things: 1. That the scheme of salvation through faith in the revelation of the gospel,

is

is a wiſe one; 2. That it is an effectual one; and, 3. That the execution of it is a chief object of Divine Providence. Let us conſider each of theſe in their order.

I. As to the *firſt*, The apoſtle, indeed, in the language of the conceited pretenders to wiſdom in thoſe days, calls it fooliſhneſs; yet at the ſame time he plainly intimates, that what they called fooliſhneſs, was in reality the moſt perfect wiſdom; and in the verſes following the text, he expreſsly calls it the wiſdom of God. It muſt be obvious at firſt ſight, that the exhibition of the wiſdom of this ſcheme in the moſt extenſive view of it, as laid before the foundation of the world, and as carried on in a continued progreſs, and an amazing variety of ſteps, from the firſt apoſtaſy till the reſtitution of all things, is an undertaking to which none of the ſons of men are equal. The full diſplay of the beauty and marvellous wiſdom of it in its wonderful contrivance, and wonderful execution, from the beginning, to its final accompliſhment, muſt be reſerved for a fund of everlaſting entertainment in the regions of perfect knowledge. It is our duty, in our preſent ſtate, to contemplate the obvious and ſtriking wiſdom of thoſe great lines of it, which are clearly revealed, and are eaſily comprehended. Every one knows, that wiſdom conſiſts in chuſing the moſt proper means to accompliſh the beſt ends. The great end propoſed by the goſpel-revelation, is the deliverance of mankind from a ſtate of darkneſs, corruption, and

guilt; and raiſing them to a ſtate of light, purity, and favour with God.

Whether we conſider, *firſt*, the matter of this revelation, or *ſecondly*, the method of communicating it, and confirming its truth, we ſhall diſcern all poſſible marks of the higheſt wiſdom.

1. The matter of this revelation may be ſummed up under the two heads, of doctrines, and precepts.

1*ſt*, With regard to the doctrines, let it be obſerved, that it is not the intention of them to inſtruct us in the knowledge of every thing that may be really uſeful to us with reſpect to the intereſts of this preſent life, far leſs of every thing which from curioſity we may have a mighty deſire to know. The goſpel-revelation conſiders mankind in their higheſt capacity, as the rational and accountable ſubjects of God, and as capable both of preſent and future happineſs or miſery according to their behaviour: and it is the chief, if not the ſole deſign of it, to give us thoſe views and impreſſions of our nature, of our ſtate, of the perfections, the counſels, the laws, and the government of God, which, under the influence of divine grace, are the immediate means of the purity, of the comfort, and of the moral order and perfection of our ſouls. As we are corrupted and diſordered, our natures are incapable of their true happineſs till they are purified, and reſtored to order. As we are guilty and mortal creatures, we can have no true conſolation

without the hopes of pardon, and immortality. It is evident, therefore, that the chief uſe and excellence of the doctrines of revelation, muſt lie in the influence they have upon the ſanctification and conſolation of our hearts: and indeed, the whole ſtrain of the ſcriptures ſhows us, that theſe are the great ends of all the diſcoveries of the goſpel. Our Saviour evidently ſuppoſes that truth is of a purifying nature, when he prays *, "Sanctify them through thy "truth: thy word is truth." The apoſtle teaches the ſame doctrine, when he aſſerts †, that "God hath from the beginning choſen "us to ſalvation, through ſanctification of the "ſpirit and belief of the truth:" The apoſtle John, after ſpeaking of the truths of the goſpel, adds, ‡ "Theſe things write we unto you, "that your joy may be full." And indeed it muſt be obvious to every one who attends to the natural operation of truth upon the minds of men, that it is not the precepts of Chriſtianity, but the truths of it, which are the direct and immediate means of purifying and comforting their hearts. It is not, for inſtance, the precept, "Love not the world," but it is the clear diſcernment of the truth, that worldly things are vain, and inſufficient for happineſs, which is the effectual mean of abating our too ardent love and purſuit of them. It is not the precept, "Humble yourſelves," but it is the clear view and lively impreſſion of the

* John, xvii. 17. † 2 Theſ. ii. 13. ‡ John, i. 4.

truth

truth of our ſtate, as dependent, weak, indigent, depraved, and guilty creatures, that produces a humble temper of mind. It is not the command, "To love God with all your hearts," but it is a full view of the truth of the divine character, as excellent and perfect in the higheſt degree, which is the natural means of kindling the ſacred flame of love in our breaſts. It is not the precept, "Rejoice in the Lord Jeſus," but it is the belief of the truth, as to his glorious character and undertaking, and the mighty benefits we enjoy and hope to enjoy by him, which excites real joy in our hearts. Here then lies the excellency and wiſdom of the doctrines of the goſpel, that they tally exactly with the preſent ſtate of mankind, and are admirably adapted, (with the concurrence of divine aſſiſtance, which we are encouraged to aſk), to cure every diſeaſe, every diſorder of the human heart; to beget, to cheriſh, and confirm, every pure, every virtuous, every pious diſpoſition; and to eſtabliſh our ſouls in peace and joy. Every one muſt be ſenſible, that the bounds preſcribed for this diſcourſe will not permit me to take all the doctrines of Chriſtianity under conſideration, and to ſhow, that the firm belief of each of them has a natural tendency to cleanſe us from the filthineſs of the fleſh and ſpirit, and to perfect in us true holineſs, and ſpiritual joy. We may juſt mention a few inſtances for the illuſtration of the point.

Thus, it is a certain fact, that mankind are at preſent in a ſtate of corruption, and at the

ſame time apt to be inſenſible of the miſery and danger of it under the government of God. Surely nothing can be conceived more fit to awaken them to a juſt ſenſe of their condition, than a meſſenger from heaven, clothed with the authority of God, ſetting before them the intrinſic malignity and miſery of ſin, and the certain, the dreadful, and eternal conſequences of continuing in the love and practice of it. If we could deſcend to a particular view of the ſeveral diſorders and corruptions of the ſouls of men, it were eaſy to ſhow, that the firm belief of the doctrines of the goſpel, is the natural and the beſt antidote or remedy for each of them: and particularly it might be ſhown, that the clear and full manifeſtation which the goſpel has given of the character of God, and the laws of his moral government, and of the terms of ſalvation, are admirably calculated to root out the principles of ſuperſtition, and all falſe notions deſtructive to the virtue and happineſs of mankind, and to plant in their room thoſe principles which have a natural tendency to promote their virtue, their perfection, and felicity. But this would be a ſubject more proper for a practical treatiſe, than a ſingle ſermon. Every one who has a juſt value for the doctrines of the goſpel, and who takes pleaſure in the contemplation of Divine Wiſdom, will trace out, with great delight, the natural operations and effects of the truths of revelation, on the hearts of thoſe who really believe them.

Again:

Again: Are mankind in a ſtate of guilt? Is there a ſenſe of guilt, and dread of the Divine diſpleaſure, ſo univerſal among mankind, in ſome degree or other, that it may be conſidered as a characteriſtic of the ſpecies? Are the minds of all ſorts of men, from the moſt learned philoſophers down to the greateſt ſavages, ſubject, on ſome occaſions, and in ſome ſerious moments, to ſuch remorſe, as makes them wiſh for ſome method of expiating their offences? Are the minds even of the moſt enlightened men, thoſe who have the higheſt ſtandard of moral perfection, and the quickeſt ſenſe of duty, ſo conſcious of the guilt of ſins of leſſer malignity, and of the omiſſions of what they ought to have done, that they dread what the conſequences may be under the government of a God of perfect holineſs? Does not this ſenſe of guilt ſometimes riſe to ſuch a degree of anxiety as greatly to diſturb, and ſometimes even to diſtract the minds of men? Does the force of this natural ſentiment appear not only in individuals, but in the ſocieties of mankind? Have atonements of one ſort or another, for averting the diſpleaſure of Deity, been eſtabliſhed in all national religions in all ages of the world? What can be conceived more admirably fitted to give relief and conſolation to the heart of man, alarmed with the fears of deſerved puniſhment, than the doctrines of the goſpel, * "that God is in Chriſt, reconciling

* 2 Cor. v. 19.

"the world unto himſelf, and not imputing to "men their treſpaſſes;" and that Jeſus Chriſt by his obedience and humiliation to death, even the death of the croſs, has offered up an atonement of the higheſt dignity, and moſt perfect and extenſive efficacy, of which the Great God, and merciful Governor of the world, has given the higheſt teſtimony of his acceptance *.

The time will not allow me to point out in what a variety of ways, and with what divine wiſdom, this doctrine of Chriſtianity, with the other doctrines of the exaltation of Jeſus to be a Prince and Saviour, connected with it, are calculated to promote both the purity and joy of the hearts of the children of men. Let it only be obſerved, that the peculiar doctrines of our peace, and acceptance with God, through Jeſus Chriſt, and that the only acceptable method of approaching to God in religious wor-

* There is reaſon to ſuſpect, that ſome are prejudiced againſt the doctrine of Jeſus Chriſt's being the propitiation for the ſins of the world, from a wrong notion of it, as implying that God was rendered merciful and placable by it, when he was otherwiſe before: whereas it is the clear and undiſputed doctrine of the goſpel, that God is eſſentially benign and merciful; and that the propitiation is ſo far from being the cauſe of the Divine mercy, that it is the effect of it: it was the eſſential mercy of the Divine nature, which moved him to appoint the atonement, and to accept of it. The atonement, through the blood of Jeſus, is the method choſen by infinite wiſdom of extending his eſſential mercy to penitents, in a way perfectly conſiſtent with the purity, the righteouſneſs, the order and dignity of his moral government.

ſhip

ſhip is in the name of Jeſus, have a native tendency to bear down that vanity, pride, and ſelf-confidence, ſo apt to ariſe in the heart of man, and to beget and preſerve that humility of mind, which is the only true foundation, on which the whole ſuperſtructure of the virtues of the Chriſtian life can be raiſed. The ſerious and habitual ſenſe of thoſe important truths, muſt carry along with it an humbling impreſſion of our guilt and unworthineſs, while at the ſame time it ſolaces our hearts, with the exalting hopes of the favour of God, and of that eternal life which is his gift through Jeſus Chriſt.

We cannot conclude this head, without obſerving the conſpicuous wiſdom of the appointment of the one Mediator, the ſole Head, the ſole Law-giver and Judge of his church. It was a very ancient prediction concerning him, "that to him the gathering of the people "ſhould be," Gen. xlix. 10. There is a later one to the ſame purpoſe, John xi. 52. "That "he ſhould gather together in one, the chil-"dren of God that were ſcattered abroad." The whole New Teſtament is full of this doctrine, "That he is the head, in whom all fulneſs "dwells." He himſelf foretold, "that when "he ſhould be lifted up, he would draw all "men after him." It is evident to every one, that the reducing of men under one great head, is the moſt natural mean of uniting them to one another, and to the great God and Father of all. The moſt ordinary obſervation of

the

the world, will convince every one what a mighty power the attachment to one chief, in learning, in arts, or in government, always has, to bind men together in affection, and friendly ſociety. This is the effect of it, when there is nothing but joint admiration, without dependence and expectations; but the effect is much ſtronger, when there is a great dependence, and hopes of many great advantages common to all, from the power and favour of the leader. How much more then muſt the ſubjecting of mankind to one great and glorious Head, for whom they have the higheſt veneration, from whom they have received the moſt invaluable benefits, and on whom all their future hopes depend, contribute to unite them in the ſtricteſt bonds of friendſhip? Here are all poſſible motives to the moſt hearty and entire union; here are no ſources of diviſion and diſſenſion, from competition of intereſt, or rivalſhip in the favour of the prince. All faithful ſubjects are equally aſſured of his favour and protection, and of being conducted forward to final felicity and glory under his divine adminiſtration. Perhaps it will be aſked, Since it is the natural tendency of this conſtitution to produce union, why does not the effect follow? why do we not ſee a total union among the ſubjects of this kingdom? If this were the proper place for it, perhaps it might be ſhown, that it has produced very real and viſible effects, beſides thoſe inviſible ones which it certainly does produce at all times, on the minds of all who love our Lord

Jeſus

Jeſus Chriſt in ſincerity. We have ground to hope, that it will ſtill operate in a more conſpicuous manner, even in this world. The full and perfect effects of it are juſtly hoped for in ſome future period, according to the all-prevalent prayer of the glorious Head himſelf, "That they may be one, even as we are one," John xvii. 21. 22.

The tendency of this divine appointment of one Mediator, the Head of all, to unite mankind unto God, is ſo plain and obvious, that it is ſcarcely neceſſary to illuſtrate it. It muſt be evident at firſt ſight, that the ſubmiſſion of mankind to this one great Head and Miniſter of Providence, is at the ſame time an actual ſubjection to the Father, who appointed him. There is an inſeparable connection betwixt ſubjection to the Son of God, conſtituted by the Father, Lord and Judge of all, and real ſubjection to the Father himſelf. The laws of the Mediator, are the laws of God; and the very firſt and greateſt of theſe laws is, to love the one God, with all our hearts, and with all our ſouls. Beſides, Jeſus is the image of the inviſible God:* "He that hath known him, knows "the Father alſo." The love of the perfect Image, coincides with the love of the all-perfect Original. † "He that hateth the Son, hateth "the Father alſo." That union with God and man, muſt for ever conſtitute the higheſt perfection and happineſs of our rational and im-

* John, xiv. 7. † John, xv. 23.

mortal

mortal natures, is a truth ſo plain and evident, that it needs neither explication nor proof.

We ſhall conclude this part of the ſubject, by obſerving, that this circumſtance, that the great Mediator was once viſible in a body, tabernacling among mankind, is not to be overlooked in an inquiry into the wiſdom of the Chriſtian ſcheme. For, by dwelling in fleſh, he was qualified to inſtruct us in the will of God in a familiar manner; to ſet us a perfect example of all virtues, in a real human character; to have a fellow-feeling of our infirmities; and to ſuffer and die as a propitiation for our ſins. To which, perhaps, it may be added, that as the mind of man ſeems ſomehow to ſtand in need of ſomething viſible, on which the imagination can lay hold, and reſt itſelf; the goſpel is wiſely accommodated to this demand of human nature. When we meditate on our glorious Mediator, who is now inviſible, under the characters of our great Inſtructor, High-prieſt, and Law-giver, we can more eaſily ſtay our imaginations, and fix our thoughts, by reflecting upon him as once viſible in our nature, than we could have done, had he been a purely angelical being, who had never appeared in a viſible form upon earth, or converſed with mankind.

2*dly*, We now proceed to the ſecond head under which we ſummed up the matter of Chriſtianity, namely, the precepts of it. Here it is not intended to explain, or illuſtrate, the purity and perfection of the Chriſtian precepts,

or to compare them with any other systems of morals, which may have been held in esteem among mankind, that their superior excellency may thence appear. Let it suffice at present to observe, that though the precepts of our holy religion are not the direct and immediate means of our sanctification and comfort, as has been shown under the former head; yet they are real, though more remote, means of them, and as important and essential parts of the gospel as the doctrines themselves. It is the laws of Christianity which set before us that standard of moral perfection, which we ought to have always full in our eye: they lay us under the solemn and indispensable obligation to aspire perpetually to nearer conformity to the perfections and to the will of God in all holiness of heart and life. It is the laws of Jesus which enjoin us in the strongest and the most sacred manner, to employ our most serious attention upon the truths of his religion, to inculcate them upon ourselves, till they produce their full effect on the purity and comfort of our souls: and indeed, without a humble consciousness that we have endeavoured to govern ourselves by the laws of our religion, as far as human infirmity will permit, we can have no well-grounded hope of the favour of God, and of that happy "immortality which is brought "to light by the gospel of Jesus Christ."

2. Having taken this general view of the matter of the revelation of the gospel, we now go forward to consider what was proposed

in

in the ſecond place; the manner of communicating it, and of confirming the truth of it.

The wiſdom of the goſpel is no leſs conſpicuous in the manner of communicating its inſtruction than in the matter of it. That faith in the teſtimony of a divine teacher, is a method of inſtruction more ſuited to the preſent ſtate of mankind, than that of laboured deductions of reaſon and philoſophy, is evident on the ſmalleſt reflection. The bulk of mankind never were, nor are at preſent, in ſuch a ſituation, that they could reaſon out a clear and full ſyſtem of the truths of religion for themſelves, or even follow the trains of reaſonings of others, ſo as to receive ſatisfactory conviction from them. But when the doctrines of religion are delivered as communications from the Father of lights, by a perſon who has given full evidence of his divine commiſſion, there is not only a plain foundation laid for giving credit to his teſtimony, but it is accompanied with an authority which commands the attention of the human mind, and impoſes an obligation upon it to believe and obey. Thouſands, nay, millions of mankind, may be brought to the knowledge of the truths and duties of natural religion, in this way, who could never have attained to it by diſquiſitions of philoſophy; and as to the peculiar truths of divine revelation, there is no other way of attaining the knowledge of them.

The goſpel-method of inſtruction is further accommodated, with the moſt ſtriking wiſdom,

to the circumſtances of mankind; as it not only employs the plaineſt and moſt ſimple expreſſions and ſimilitudes, in the delivery of its doctrines and precepts; but it takes the aſſiſtance of ſuch facts and examples, as the loweſt underſtanding can eaſily comprehend, and the weakeſt memory may eaſily retain. Does the goſpel teach the rejoicing doctrine of the reſurrection of the dead? it not only does it by plain aſſertions, but examples of dead perſons raiſed to life. Does it teach that the Saviour has the power of forgiving ſins? he exerciſes, in the view of all, that very power, by delivering men from thoſe diſeaſes which are the puniſhments of ſin: again: Is the one eternal God, the creator of all things, too great, and too glorious an object, for our weak minds to behold? would his unvailed glory quite overpower our feeble natures? The goſpel exhibits him to us in a mild and ſhaded glory, in the perſon, the character, and conduct of Jeſus, "who is the viſible image of the inviſible God." The divine perfections and providence are repreſented to us in him, in a way ſuited to our low capacities. When our Saviour ſaid, "I "will, be thou clean," and, "Man, ſtretch "forth thy withered hand," and the effect inſtantaneouſly followed, he gave a ſtriking repreſentation of that almighty creative power which brought this univerſe into exiſtence. When he ſaid to the ſea, "Be thou calm," he gave an image of the ſovereign dominion of God over all nature. His many unerring

in the ſecond place; the manner of communicating it, and of confirming the truth of it.

The wiſdom of the goſpel is no leſs conſpicuous in the manner of communicating its inſtruction than in the matter of it. That faith in the teſtimony of a divine teacher, is a method of inſtruction more ſuited to the preſent ſtate of mankind, than that of laboured deductions of reaſon and philoſophy, is evident on the ſmalleſt reflection. The bulk of mankind never were, nor are at preſent, in ſuch a ſituation, that they could reaſon out a clear and full ſyſtem of the truths of religion for themſelves, or even follow the trains of reaſonings of others, ſo as to receive ſatisfactory conviction from them. But when the doctrines of religion are delivered as communications from the Father of lights, by a perſon who has given full evidence of his divine commiſſion, there is not only a plain foundation laid for giving credit to his teſtimony, but it is accompanied with an authority which commands the attention of the human mind, and impoſes an obligation upon it to believe and obey. Thouſands, nay, millions of mankind, may be brought to the knowledge of the truths and duties of natural religion, in this way, who could never have attained to it by diſquiſitions of philoſophy; and as to the peculiar truths of divine revelation, there is no other way of attaining the knowledge of them.

The goſpel-method of inſtruction is further accommodated, with the moſt ſtriking wiſdom,

to the circumſtances of mankind; as it not only employs the plaineſt and moſt ſimple expreſſions and ſimilitudes, in the delivery of its doctrines and precepts; but it takes the aſſiſtance of ſuch facts and examples, as the loweſt underſtanding can eaſily comprehend, and the weakeſt memory may eaſily retain. Does the goſpel teach the rejoicing doctrine of the reſurrection of the dead? it not only does it by plain aſſertions, but examples of dead perſons raiſed to life. Does it teach that the Saviour has the power of forgiving ſins? he exerciſes, in the view of all, that very power, by delivering men from thoſe diſeaſes which are the puniſhments of ſin: again: Is the one eternal God, the creator of all things, too great, and too glorious an object, for our weak minds to behold? would his unvailed glory quite overpower our feeble natures? The goſpel exhibits him to us in a mild and ſhaded glory, in the perſon, the character, and conduct of Jeſus, "who is the viſible image of the inviſible God." The divine perfections and providence are repreſented to us in him, in a way ſuited to our low capacities. When our Saviour ſaid, "I "will, be thou clean," and, "Man, ſtretch "forth thy withered hand," and the effect inſtantaneouſly followed, he gave a ſtriking repreſentation of that almighty creative power which brought this univerſe into exiſtence. When he ſaid to the ſea, "Be thou calm," he gave an image of the ſovereign dominion of God over all nature. His many unerring

predictions of future events, were a lively repreſentation of that divine foreknowledge and omniſcience, which ſees at one view the whole ſeries of events from the beginning to the end of time. It were eaſy in like manner to ſhow, that the ſpotleſs purity, the diſintereſted and ever-active goodneſs, the melting compaſſion, the unconquerable meekneſs, the incomparable lenity, and forgiving temper, of the Son of man, manifeſted in his character and conduct, are the juſteſt and nobleſt repreſentations of the moral perfections of God.

Add to this, that in the life of Jeſus we have all the Chriſtian virtues ſet before us, in their full perfection, as patterns for our imitation: and this is done in a ſeries of facts well calculated to inform the judgement, to warm the affections, and to make a laſting impreſſion upon the memory. This pattern is not only perfect, and ſuited to our condition, but is further inforced by the dignity of the perſon, and by the ſweet but powerful influence accompanying the idea of the Friend, the Benefactor and Saviour. Beſides, we have in Jeſus, not only a pattern of all virtue, but a pattern alſo of the reward that ſhall be beſtowed upon it. "As he overcame, and is ſet down with "his Father on his throne *;" if we overcome the temptations of the world, he will grant to us to ſit down with him on his throne. Here is a proof from fact, of a future reward. And ſurely a more elevating and triumphant

* Rev. iii. 21.

conſideration

consideration cannot enter into the heart of man, than this, that our common nature is already crowned with glory and honour, in the person of Jesus Christ; and that, if we resemble him in purity and goodness here, we shall be made like unto him in felicity and glory hereafter.

Again: The divine wisdom of the method in which Christianity is confirmed, will appear, if we consider, that the proofs which it offers of its truth, are not such subtile and difficult reasonings as may perplex the minds of mankind, but they are either appeals to the natural sentiments of the human heart, or to such facts and events as lie open to the examination of persons of all capacities. What is commonly called the internal evidence of Christianity, is nothing else but an appeal to the heart of man, as to the excellency of its doctrines and precepts, and as to the perfect purity, goodness, and integrity, of the character of its author. The external evidence, from miracles and prophecies, are every way suited to work on the minds of all mankind.

Miracles are the seals of heaven, and strike conviction at once. But besides their being the most authentic evidences of the divine commission of him that performs them, and of the truth of the doctrines which he publishes, they at the same time are the most irresistible proofs, that this visible world has a superior, who can alter and change its order and laws at his pleasure. Some of the inquiring

ring and philoſophical part of mankind, have inclined to conclude, from the regularity and ſtability of the order of the material world, that it cannot be changed by any power whatſoever; nay, that this whole of things is the eternal and ſelf-exiſtent Being. Miracles are the ſhorteſt and moſt unanſwerable confutation of this impious and atheiſtical opinion.

The other great proof of Chriſtianity, taken from the accompliſhment of prophecies, is likewiſe accommodated, with the higheſt wiſdom, to the condition of mankind. Predictions of whole ſerieſes of events, the moſt conſpicuous, the moſt memorable, the moſt intereſting, of all others in the courſe of the world, and quite beyond the reach of all human foreſight, when perceived to be exactly accompliſhed, can ſcarce fail to ſtrike perſons of all conditions and of all capacities, and produce a conviction of the moſt ſatisfactory kind, of a ſupreme intelligence and wiſdom, conducting all the affairs of the world. How much the belief of a Providence directing and governing all things, elevates the human mind, and fills it with a pure and ſacred joy, the experience of all virtuous perſons will abundantly teſtify. And at the ſame time the undoubted accompliſhment of theſe prophecies, gives the fulleſt ſatisfaction, that the perſon who delivered them, knows the counſels and will of God in other inſtances, and may be ſafely relied on when he ſpeaks in the name of God, and declares his will, either concerning the rules

of

of life, and the terms upon which ſinners may be received into his favour, or concerning the future and eternal ſtate of thoſe who embrace and of thoſe who reject the goſpel.

This argument from prophecy is peculiarly adapted to eſtabliſh the mind in the fulleſt perſuaſion of the certainty of what the goſpel reveals concerning a future judgement, the reſurrection of the dead, and a happy immortality beyond death and the grave. It muſt be acknowledged, that the accompliſhment of numberleſs former predictions is the beſt pledge and ſecurity, that thoſe which are not yet accompliſhed, ſhall alſo come to paſs in God's due time. The acuteſt philoſophers readily admit, that the doctrine of the immortality of the ſoul is incapable of ſtrict demonſtrative evidence; yet without the perſuaſion of it, all other doctrines, even thoſe of a good God, and wiſe Providence, though never ſo fully demonſtrated, can impart but feeble and imperfect conſolation to the hearts of mortal creatures. Where then ſhall we go for ſatisfaction as to this moſt intereſting of all queſtions? Shall we ſit down at the feet of the philoſophers, who acknowledge they cannot ſatisfy us? Shall we rely on their conjectures and probable reaſonings? Or ſhall we hearken to the prophetic Spirit, which has been tried, and found faithful in all inſtances from the beginning of the world to this day? Surely that Spirit which has given the moſt convincing evidence imaginable, that

it foreſaw the whole train of events from the beginning to the end of this world, may be relied upon as beſt qualified to inform us of what is to follow after the diſſolution of the preſent ſtate of things.

To conclude: It is a further proof of the wiſdom of prophecy as a principal evidence of divine revelation, that it gives the ſtrongeſt preſumption of the reality of miracles. For if there are the moſt convincing proofs, that ſome men have been endowed with extraordinary, nay ſupernatural knowledge and foreſight, this renders it highly probable, that the ſame perſons, or others for the ſame great and good ends, may alſo have been endowed with miraculous powers. And thus, we who live in the preſent age, and have equal, if not in ſome reſpects fuller, evidence of the fulfilment of prophecies, than thoſe who lived in former ones, may juſtly conſider the argument from prophecy as a ſtrong confirmation of all the other evidences with which the reality of the goſpel-miracles is aſcertained. From what has been ſuggeſted it appears, that whether we conſider the matter of the Chriſtian revelation, the manner of communicating it, or the kind of evidence with which it is ſupported, we ſhall find, they all concur to aſcertain the perfect wiſdom of its author. If any one pretends to call in queſtion the perfect propriety and fitneſs of the means which the divine wiſdom has choſen in the goſpel to enlighten, to convert, and ſave mankind, it is incumbent

cumbent upon him to deviſe another ſet of means better calculated to accompliſh theſe great and good ends. On this point we may be ſecure, and ſafely challenge the utmoſt efforts of human imagination to form any ſcheme, the wiſdom of which will be able to bear any compariſon with the wiſdom of the goſpel.

SER-

SERMON XIII.

The Subject continued.

By WILLIAM LEECHMAN, D. D.

1 COR. i. 21.

For after that, in the wiſdom of God, the world by wiſdom knew not God, it pleaſed God by the fooliſhneſs of preaching to ſave them that believe.

II. THE *ſecond* obſervation is, That the apoſtle's aſſertion implies, or rather indeed expreſſes, that this ſcheme of the ſalvation of mankind by the goſpel-revelation ſhall be made effectual. It has pleaſed God actually to ſave by it thoſe who embrace and ſubmit to it. The effects of Chriſtianity are too large a ſubject to be treated here at full length: let it ſuffice at preſent to make a few obſervations.

Such as, firſt, That many of the moſt real and important effects of the diſpenſation of the goſpel are of a ſilent and inviſible nature, and cannot admit of ſuch proof as is not liable to diſpute and cavil among thoſe who love obſcurity and doubtfulneſs. We cannot draw aſide the vail which hides the inviſible world, and ſhow the myriads who through faith in Jeſus Chriſt already inherit the promiſes, and rejoice in the full and uninterrupted aſſurance of the favour

favour of God. Neither can the ſecret yet powerful efficacy of the doctrines of Chriſtianity, in turning many millions in this preſent ſtate "from darkneſs to light, from the power "of ſin and Satan to the ſervice of the living "God," and in pouring the moſt divine conſolations into their hearts, under the diſtreſſes of life, and in the hour of death, be demonſtrated in ſuch a manner as to ſilence thoſe who are determined to gainſay it.

Secondly, It may be obſerved, that as the principles of Chriſtianity have an undoubted, natural, and invariable tendency to produce good effects, and as they have taken hold of the minds of innumerable multitudes of mankind through a courſe of ages, they muſt have produced them in ſome degree. To ſay, that no good effects have been produced in any degree, or in any one inſtance, by the principles of the goſpel, though acknowledged to be believed, amounts to a denial of the tendency of them. This is what the higheſt ſcepticiſm will not venture to aſſert. But we do not reſt the argument upon the tendency, but aſſert, that Chriſtianity has actually produced good effects, as conſpicuous and undeniable, at leaſt, as were ever produced by any other principles whatever. And that they were the effects of Chriſtianity in the ſtricteſt ſenſe, and cannot be aſcribed to any other cauſes, we maintain on theſe three grounds: *Firſt*, Becauſe they flowed naturally from the principles of Chriſtianity; *Secondly*, Becauſe they were produced on thoſe only

only who believed and profeſſed them; and, *Thirdly*, Becauſe they were not accidental and tranſitory effects, but as laſting and ſteady as the principles themſelves, and accompanied them where-ever they ſpread. For inſtance, the great fundamental doctrine of one only God, the ſole object of worſhip, and to be worſhipped through one Mediator, and the principal part of whoſe worſhip conſiſts in rational prayers and praiſes, and imitation of his moral perfections, as it has a natural tendency to extirpate the principles of Polytheiſm and ſuperſtition, ſo it did in fact extirpate them in the moſt viſible manner. Thoſe who embraced this great eſſential principle, at once threw off that immenſe load of ſuperſtitious practices, to which the doctrine of numberleſs objects of worſhip had formerly ſubjected them. The civil and eccleſiaſtical hiſtory of the firſt ages of Chriſtianity, affords the fulleſt evidence, that the converts to Chriſtianity would not join in any one rite or ceremony performed in honour of the Heathen gods. Such a mighty revolution did the belief of one God produce, not only in the minds, but in the practice of Chriſtians. The hiſtory of the perſecutions under the Heathen emperors, in which they ſuffered death in the moſt formidable ſhapes, rather than offer incenſe or ſacrifice to a Heathen god, is a ſtanding demonſtration of the undoubted effects which their principles had upon them. And it is certain, that where-ever Chriſtianity ſpread, it entirely demoliſhed Polytheiſm, and

all

all its appendages; ſo that now for more than a thouſand years, incenſe has not been offered, or a libation made, to any Heathen deity, through the greateſt part at leaſt of the Roman empire. It is ſo evident, that theſe effects bear all the three characters mentioned above, of real and genuine ones, that it needs not be particularly illuſtrated. And if we candidly compare this change which Chriſtianity has introduced, with the change made by any ſect of philoſophy, any inſtitution of religion or civil government, we ſhall be at no loſs to determine which is the greateſt.

Again: The effect of the Chriſtian principles, in aboliſhing the evocation of demons, with all the train of abſurd, and ſometimes horrid, practices which accompanied it, is extremely remarkable. The hiſtory of the Heathen world allows us no room to doubt, that not only the vulgar, but the moſt learned philoſophers and emperors, were addicted, almoſt to a degree of frenzy, to the practice of theurgic or diabolical rites *, as certain means of maintaining communion

* There were two kinds of magic in the Heathen world; the one was called *Theurgy*, and the other *Sorcery*. The firſt was employed in the worſhip of the good and beneficent demons: and however ſtrange, fanatical, and abſurd it really was; yet in the opinion of thoſe who practiſed it, it was a divine art, which had no other aim than to purify and perfect the ſouls of men; and thoſe who were ſo happy as to perform the rites of it in a right manner, enjoyed intimate communion with the demons, were inveſted with all their powers, and admitted to the full vision of their eſſence.

munion with the demons, and of obliging them to comply with their deſires. As the renunciation of all communion with demons was the natural tendency of the belief of Chriſtianity, ſo we find in fact that it ſometimes produced this effect in an immediate and inſtantaneous manner. Acts of the Apoſtles, xix. 17. 18. 19. "And this was known to all the Jews "and Greeks alſo dwelling at Epheſus; and "fear fell on them all, and the name of the "Lord Jeſus was magnified. And many "that believed came, and confeſſed, and ſhew-"ed their deeds. Many alſo of them which "uſed curious arts, brought their books toge-"ther, and burned them before all men: and "they counted the price of them, and found it "fiftythouſand pieces of ſilver." That theſe curious books contained the rules to be obſerved for the acceptable performance of the magical or theurgic arts, is acknowledged by all inquirers into antiquity.

It deſerves our particular attention, in an enumeration of the good effects of the revela-

eſſence. The other kind (viz. *Sorcery*) was employed only in the worſhip of the wicked demons. The ceremonies of it were horrible and ſhocking, and the end propoſed by it was to do miſchief, and to perpetrate crimes. This diſtinction ought to be carried along with us in judging of many of the higheſt characters in the ancient world. The kind of magic to which they were devoted, gives ground for a conſiderable difference in the judgement we form of them. Whether the paſſage in 19th of the Acts refers to the one or other of theſe kinds of magic, or to both, we ſhall not now inquire.

tion of the goſpel, that the ſubjection of Chriſtians to one great head, their ſole Inſtructor and Lawgiver, has produced ſuch an unity of faith, as to many eſſential articles both of natutural and revealed religion, as (notwithſtanding differences of opinion in leſſer matters) was never found in the Heathen world. It has likewiſe produced an uniform reception of a body of moral laws, of ſuch acknowledged excellence, that nothing even in imagination can be conceived more pure and perfect. Theſe effects of this divine conſtitution of one glorious head, are more important and ſignal than is commonly imagined, and muſt always prove a real foundation of union among Chriſtians.

The doctrine too of the all-ſufficient ſacrifice of the great High-prieſt of our profeſſion, who by "one offering hath perfected for ever "them that are ſanctified," has put an end to the practice of animal ſacrifices, as well as to the more horrid cuſtom of human ones, both which prevailed in the greateſt part of the ancient world.

That the genius of Chriſtianity is kind and benign, muſt be admitted by every one who attends to it. According to the Chriſtian doctrine, "God is love, and dwells in love;" and the great Mediator was animated in the whole of his undertaking by the ſame generous and divine principle. The laws of Jeſus breathe nothing but love and tenderneſs; and his whole life is one continued proof of the moſt diſintereſted and unwearied beneficence. The

Chriſtian heaven is the land of love and of everlaſting friendſhip. This benign ſpirit of our holy religion has manifeſted itſelf in producing the moſt beneficial effects, in a variety of ways, where-ever it has been received and underſtood. The influence of it upon the civil laws of nations, in making them more gentle and merciful than they were before, muſt be owned by all who have read hiſtory with a proper attention.

The laws prohibiting the expoſition of infants, and the bloody and barbarous entertainment of gladiators *; the laws and cuſtoms ſoftening

* Thoſe who have not attended to hiſtory are apt to imagine, that the exhibition of gladiators was a rare thing, and that when it happened a few pairs only were engaged. But it was far otherwiſe. Under the Roman emperors this inhuman entertainment coſt innumerable lives. Cæſar, when edile, gave 320 gladiators. Gordian, in the time of his edileſhip, exhibited twelve entertainments, that is one for each month: in ſome of theſe there were 500 champions, and in none of them leſs than 150: taking it at a medium, he muſt have exhibited at the very leaſt 3000. Titus exhibited theſe cruel ſhows for 100 days together. The good and moderate Trajan, continued theſe ſpectacles for 123 days, and in that time gave 10,000. When we conſider how many different ranks of people gave theſe entertainments, ediles, pretors, queſtors, conſuls, emperors, and prieſts, beſides private perſons at funerals, (which became ſo common a practice, that it was an article in a laſt will), we muſt be convinced, that the numbers were incredible. What adds to the inhumanity of this cuſtom is, that it was deſigned for a gay entertainment, and attended as ſuch. This horrible cuſtom grew to ſuch an extravagance, that it was found neceſſary to moderate it by law in the time of the Heathen emperors. Conſtantine

ſtrong and convincing as can well be given for any fact of ſo ancient a date.

III. This aſſertion of the apoſtle further implies, that the ſcheme of the ſalvation of mankind through faith in the revelation of the goſpel, is a chief object of Divine Providence. *It pleaſed God, by the fooliſhneſs of preaching, to ſave thoſe who believe.* The word in the original is very ſignificant, but our tranſlation does not reach the full import of it. It denotes a high degree of delight and complacency in a perſon or thing. It is the word uſed by the miraculous voice at our Saviour's baptiſm and tranſfiguration, "This is my beloved Son, in whom "I am well pleaſed." It might eaſily be ſhown, that the ſame grounds of complacency are referred to in theſe paſſages and in the text. An expreſſion of ſuch energy (*it pleaſed God highly*), when applied to the goſpel-method of ſalvation, ſeems to denote, that it is the chief ſcheme of Providence with reſpect to mankind, to which all others are ſubſervient. And indeed the general ſtrain of the ſcriptures lead us to conceive of it in this elevated view. We are every where taught in the New Teſtament, that the appearance of the Saviour among mankind, was in conſequence of an original plan of Providence laid before the world began, 2 Tim. i. 9. 10. "God, who hath ſaved us, ac- "cording to his own purpoſe and grace, which "was given us in Chriſt Jeſus before the "world began, but is now made manifeſt by "the appearing of our Lord and Saviour."

Eph.

ſoftening or aboliſhing ſlavery; and thoſe regulating the commerce betwixt the ſexes, by forbidding Polygamy, and reſtraining the licentiouſneſs of divorcing, have all flowed from the ſpirit of Chriſtianity, and have prevented much miſery, and been the ſources of great happineſs to mankind *.

It is not neceſſary to inſiſt at full length on the viſible good effects of Chriſtianity on the tempers and manners of the firſt Chriſtians. If we were to produce here the whole evidence we have for the diſtinguiſhed purity and goodneſs of the lives of the firſt Chriſtians, when compared with their Heathen neighbours, we might inſiſt on the following topics; the authority of the apoſtles in their epiſtles, the teſtimony of the ancient Chriſtian writers, the ſolemn appeals to acknowledged facts in the apologies for Chriſtianity preſented to Heathen emperors, and the encomiums made upon them by the Heathens themſelves, and ſome of them their moſt inveterate enemies †. All theſe circumſtances united, form a proof as

Conſtantine firſt prohibited it altogether; but ſo violent was the taſte for it that it crept in again. The Emperor Honorius entirely ſuppreſſed it.

* It would be a work for a treatiſe, and perhaps a very uſeful one, to trace out the civil laws which took their riſe from the ſpirit of Chriſtianity, and to delineate their happy effects on ſociety, through a courſe of ages.

† Such as the Emperor Julian's recommendation to one of his high-prieſts, to imitate the manners of the Chriſtians. This fact we are aſſured of by the Emperor's own letter, which is ſtill remaining.

Eph. i. 3. 4. "Bleſſed be the God and Father "of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who hath bleſſed "us with all ſpiritual bleſſings in heavenly "places in Chriſt, according as he hath cho-"ſen us in him, before the foundations of the "world *. Beſides, according to the beſt notions we can form of the wiſdom and goodneſs of God, either from reaſon or revelation, the deliverance of mankind from a ſtate of darkneſs, corruption, and guilt, and the reſtoration of them to a ſtate of light, purity, and friendſhip with God, muſt be the ultimate deſign of all the diſpenſations of Providence towards them. This view of things is further confirmed from the hiſtory of Providence, as preſerved in the ſacred ſcriptures. There we have a ſeries of diſpenſations narrated, which gradually unfold the deſigns of Heaven, and lead forward towards the manifeſtation of the Meſſiah, as a grand period.

The moſt remarkable revelations of the will of God made to Abraham, and the patriarchs who ſucceeded him, till Moſes, and the whole ſucceſſion of prophets from him, down to Malachi, point towards this great event. It was the ultimate deſign of the ſeparation of the deſcendents of Jacob from the reſt of mankind, and of the whoſe Moſaic diſpenſation, to prepare the world for the advent of the Meſſiah, and to adminiſter full evidence of him, when he ſhould appear. If the poſterity of Jacob

* Eph. i. 10. 1 Pet. i. 20. John, xvii. 24. Rev. xiii. 8.

had been permitted to intermingle with the other families of mankind, the ancient promiſes made to the fathers, muſt have been diſſipated and loſt, and no proof, two thouſand years afterwards, could have been produced, that Jeſus was of the ſeed of Abraham: but by the diſtinct account of the family of Abraham, till the promulgation of the law, by the conſtitution of the Jewiſh republic, in which care was taken, that not only the Jewiſh nation ſhould be kept diſtinct from all others, but the genealogical regiſters of the particular families ſhould be preſerved, it was eaſy to trace up the pedigree of the Meſſiah to its ſource at the greateſt diſtance of time, and ſhew, that he was deſcended, not only of Abraham, but from what particular family of his numerous poſterity, through the whole ſeries of generations: add to this, that the civil conſtitution of the Jews, under whoſe authority the ſacred books were kept, was a noble guard and ſecurity for the preſervation and authenticity of the promiſes; and that the whole plan of ceremonial worſhip was ſo contrived, as to preſerve the knowledge of the one true God, and to prefigure the perſon, the offices, and the bleſſings of the reign of the Meſſiah.

Beſides, the revolutions which that ſingular people underwent, though we cannot explain the particular manner, were ſomehow connected with and conducive to the completion of the grand ſcheme, for which they were at firſt ſeparated from the reſt of the nations of

the

the world. Nay, the revolutions of the other nations of the earth, the rise, the progress, the downfall, and the succession of empires, we have ground to believe, were so ordained and conducted, as to be subservient in some way, and in some degree, to the introduction of the glorious empire of truth and righteousness under the Son of God. We learn from the sacred books *, that the Persian monarchy under Cyrus, was raised up to re-establish the Jews in their own land: their restoration to their own land, under their own laws, was necessary to accomplish the ancient prophecy †, "That "the sceptre should not depart from Judah, "nor a law-giver from between his feet, until "Shiloh come." We are informed in many other passages of the sacred writings, that other nations were employed as instruments in the hand of Providence, to favour and to protect, or to chastise and punish the chosen people. These protections and chastisements contributed to spread the knowledge of the true God, and the promises of the Messiah. When we attend to some of the ancient prophecies, particularly those of Daniel ‡, we find him describing the succession of the great empires, as terminating in the establishment of the spiritual empire, under the long-expected Saviour. It has been frequently, and very justly observed, that the union of so many great and populous kingdoms under the extensive empire of

* Isaiah, xlv. 4. † Gen. xlix. 10. ‡ Dan. ii. 34 35.

the

the Romans, at our Saviour's birth, facilitated and haſtened the wide progagation of his divine religion.

Theſe hints from ſcripture, and obſervations upon Providence, together with many others which might be collected, ſeem to intimate, that all the amazing variety of revolutions among mankind, in all nations, and in all ages, are ſo connected, (though in a way incomprehenſible to us), as to form one great ſcheme of univerſal Providence, the reſult and concluſion of which, ſhall be a happy and glorious eſtabliſhment of all things under the empire of the Son of God.

To all which we may add, that not only the revolutions and ſucceſſions of empires, but the courſe of learning, philoſophy, and arts, were made ſubſervient, under the direction of Providence, to the introduction of the true wiſdom, by the revelation of the goſpel. Though philoſophy, as has been already ſhown, did not conduct mankind to the true knowledge of God; yet we muſt not hence conclude that it was entirely uſeleſs. No! in the hand of God it produced good effects, though unforeſeen and unintended by the philoſophers themſelves. Their expoſing the groſſer inſtances of the poetical and popular religions, their teaching many excellent doctrines, and recommending many excellent virtues, were natural means of preparing the minds of men for embracing the truth, when fully diſplayed to their view. The turning the attention of mankind to moral

ral and intellectual objects and inquiries, produces great effects upon their minds: it awakens them from the lethargy of groſs ſenſuality; it abates the keenneſs of worldly purſuits; it ſpiritualizes them in ſome degree, and prepares them for receiving a more pure and refined inſtitution of religion. The very ſpirit of inquiry raiſed by philoſophy, qualified men for ſearching into the meaning, importance, and evidence of Chriſtianity; and conſequently favoured the reception of it by fair and candid minds.

Thus all the great lines of Providence through the courſe of preceding ages, were directed towards and centered in that great revolution, which, according to the eternal counſels of God, was to be accompliſhed by the Meſſiah. But as the whole ſcheme of Providence was not then completed, there is no reaſon to doubt, that it has been carrying on in a continual progreſs ſince that time, though we are unable to trace all the ſteps of it; and that it ſhall be carried on through ſucceeding ages until its final completion. There is ground to believe from the ancient prophecies, that the larger communication among mankind in all known parts of the globe opened up in later ages, is intended by Providence to prepare the way for ſpreading the knowledge of the Saviour over the face of the whole earth. The marvellous preſervation of the Jews as a diſtinct people for ſuch a long ſucceſſion of ages, may be intended to ſerve ſome illuſtrious pur-

poſes

poſes of Providence, with reſpect to the eſtabliſhment of the divine revelation of Jeſus in its full evidence and univerſal prevalence among mankind: and if it be true, that the whole plan of Providence with reſpect to mankind, was formed with a view to their reſtoration to purity, perfection, and happineſs, through Jeſus Chriſt; and that all things all along have been conducted, and ſhall be conducted to the final accompliſhment of this grand deſign; hence we ſee how juſtly Jeſus may be ſaid in the emphatical language of ſcripture to be "the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the "end of all things."

We proceed now to the LAST thing propoſed, to point out the practical inſtructions flowing from what has been ſaid.

In the firſt place, Is the Chriſtian religion the great mean ordained by God before all ages to enlighten, to ſanctify, and ſave ſuch as believe? Hence we may learn not to be much afraid of the utmoſt efforts of ſcepticiſm and unbelief. We may be aſſured the ſchemes of Providence will be carried into execution in ſpite of all oppoſition that can poſſibly be given to them. No doubt, the labours of infidels will, on looſe and thoughtleſs minds, have the moſt pernicious effects, which is to be lamented; but the native goodneſs and excellence of the religion of Jeſus is ſo ſtriking, the proſpects which it opens are ſo grand and rejoicing, and its evidence is ſo much adapted to make impreſſion

preſſion upon every fair and unprejudiced mind, that it is impoſſible any general revolution ſhould ever be brought about againſt it. The attempts to diſcredit it, like other bad attempts, will be over-ruled by Providence, to promote the intereſts of that cauſe they were intended to deſtroy.

Secondly, Is the goſpel the plan formed by divine wiſdom for accompliſhing the higheſt perfection and happineſs of mankind? Hence we may perceive the reaſon why faith is ſo peremptorily required and ſo much inſiſted on in the New Teſtament, as a term of our acceptance with God. The great and good Governor of the world may moſt certainly command his diſobedient ſubjects, to ſubmit to that ſcheme which his infinite wiſdom has deviſed, as the beſt of all others, to deliver them from all the effects and conſequences of their diſobedience. Is it admitted, that he may reaſonably require his rebellious ſubjects to repent of their rebellion, and return to their allegiance? muſt it not likewiſe be admitted as equally juſt and reaſonable, that he require them to comply with the utmoſt chearfulneſs and gratitude with that method which his wiſdom has contrived, as the moſt effectual of all others to ſecure them in their duty for the time to come, to form them to a willing ſubjection to his authority, and to that temper and character which conſtitutes their higheſt perfection and felicity under his divine adminiſtration? The command therefore to believe in Jeſus, is as

kind

kind and merciful, as it is juſt and reaſonable. It is as much the happineſs as it is the duty of mankind to yield obedience to it. Let us beware leſt we ſuffer ourſelves to ſlide inſenſibly, and without deſign, into unbelief, from an unexamined perſuaſion, that if we adhere to natural religion, and endeavour to perform the duties which it preſcribes, any attention to Chriſtianity, or faith in it, is altogether ſuperfluous and unneceſſary: let us conſider, that we owe to the light which Chriſtianity has ſpread in the world, thoſe clear and ſettled views of the doctrines and precepts of natural religion, which we ſuppoſe to be all that is neceſſary for us to know, and to practiſe: and if we do owe this knowledge to the inſtructions of Chriſtianity, can any thing be more unreaſonable or ungrateful, than not only to refuſe to acknowledge the mighty benefit, but to pervert it into an argument for diſregarding the great and kind Inſtructor?——Further, Is Jeſus Chriſt conſtituted by God the Father, the ſole enlightener of the world, the ſole diſpenſer of ſpiritual bleſſings, and the ſole law-giver and judge of mankind? is he clearly revealed to us as ſtanding inveſted in theſe high offices? If we refuſe to acknowledge him in them, we are guilty of direct contempt of the authority of God, who conſtituted him: and this is to act contrary to the firſt and fundamental principle of all natural religion, That God ought to be obeyed in all inſtances in which his authority is clearly interpoſed.

Again,

Again, Do theſe offices form a real and important relation betwixt Jeſus Chriſt and thoſe of mankind to whom he is made known? if we refuſe to act ſuitably to thoſe relations, and to perform the duties ariſing from them, we act contrary to an obligation of the ſame moral kind with that which belongs to any other relation; and conſequently our diſregarding this obligation, is as truly an act of immorality, and a violation of natural religion, as our diſregarding the duties which ariſe from the relations betwixt man and man, would be. Further ſtill, Has God choſen to communicate light, purity, and comfort to mankind, by Jeſus Chriſt? has he choſen this method, not of mere arbitrary pleaſure, but as the wiſeſt and beſt one poſſible for promoting their happineſs? if we refuſe to accept the favours of God in that way in which he hath appointed them to be beſtowed, we can have no reaſon to complain if we are deprived of them, and if we are ſubjected to the puniſhments due to thoſe who reject their own mercies. Our Saviour has declared in a ſolemn manner, John, xv. 4. "That "we cannot bear fruit unleſs we abide in "him:" And indeed it muſt be ſo, ſince he is the appointed enlightener of the world, the conductor of men to virtue, to glory, and immortality. It is true indeed, that the Chriſtian religion ſpreads through ſociety ſuch a light, and ſuch beneficial influence, that even thoſe who reject it, partake of its effects, and may be in ſome degree influenced by it. But theſe ef-

feels and this influence muſt be very inconſiderable, when compared with what a proper attention to its doctrines, its laws, its examples, its promiſes, and its threatenings, muſt have on thoſe who lay open their minds to the full impreſſions of them. And we are aſſured, that as Jeſus is the light of the world, thoſe who follow after him, ſhall not "walk in darkneſs, "but ſhall have the light of life," John, viii. 12.

Thirdly, Is Chriſtianity, the great, the wiſe, and effectual mean ordained by God of ſaving thoſe that believe? hence we may infer, that it is the duty of every one to whom it is made known, not only to receive it himſelf, and lay open his own mind to its ſacred influence; but to promote the ſubmiſſion of the reſt of mankind to it, to the utmoſt of his power. It is an acknowledged maxim, that thoſe in higher life, who poſſeſs riches, rank, or authority, are bound to employ the weight and influence of their example, and every other mean in their power, to promote the happineſs of the ſociety of which they are members. If Chriſtianity is by the appointment of Providence the beſt and wiſeſt ſcheme of rendering mankind happy, both in the preſent and in a future life, then certainly all thoſe whom Providence has placed in ſuperior ſtations, and who are the great examples and directors to the inferior claſſes of mankind, are under the moſt ſacred obligations to exert themſelves, in the moſt hearty and vigorous manner, to promote the influence of it in the hearts and lives of all around

round them: as they are the ſervants of Providence, they ought to look upon it as their greateſt honour and happineſs, as well as their duty, to concur with its great and good deſigns. It is obvious to every one, that the united influence of thoſe in high life, would have a very great effect, to ſupport and to ſpread a juſt ſenſe of religion among the lower ranks of men. The mere neglecting to exert it, though it is only an omiſſion of duty, yet as it is an omiſſion attended with very extenſive bad conſequences, it muſt be criminal in the ſight of God, and muſt expoſe the guilty perſons to deſerved puniſhment under his all-righteous adminiſtration.

But of all other orders of men, the miniſters of Jeſus are under the moſt awful obligations to promote the belief and acceptance of the goſpel-revelation. They are called by the voice of God, by the voice of ſociety, to ſpend their time, and exert all their faculties, in inculcating the truth, the importance, the excellency of the Chriſtian religion, and in ſpreading its influence every where around them. Let us then be juſt to our office: as we are ſent of God, and retained by men, to this ſervice, let us be wholly devoted to its ſacred intereſts: let God and man be witneſſes that we are faithful. Let us always remember, that it is the revelation of the will of God that we are called to teach, and that it is by this revelation, that God intended before all ages to enlighten and ſave thoſe that believe; and that it was by this

revelation that the world was actually "turned from darkneſs unto light, and from the "power of ſin and Satan, to the ſervice of the "living God," when human eloquence and wiſdom were found ineffectual. Let us work then after the model which Providence has given; and preach the ſame goſpel that the apoſtles preached. That goſpel which was the wiſdom and power of God, producing moſt aſtoniſhing effects, in the converſion of the world, ſeventeen hundred years ago, is the ſame wiſdom and the ſame power ſtill. To attempt to inſtruct or reform the world on any other plan, is to prefer our own ſchemes and views to thoſe of an all-wiſe Providence. If we fall in with the method infinite wiſdom has deviſed, we may depend upon the favourable concurrence of Providence, and that energy of divine grace which accompanied the goſpel at its firſt publication, and which we are aſſured will accompany it in ſome degree in all ages. But if we follow methods of our own invention, if we adopt the philoſophical ſchemes either of ancient or modern times, we have nothing to rely upon, but the poor effects of our own art or eloquence. Let us therefore look upon ourſelves, as ſacredly bound to teach the real doctrines of Chriſtianity in their original purity and ſimplicity, and to apply them to thoſe great ends, of the purification and conſolation of the ſouls of men, for which they were revealed, and publiſhed to the world.

It is very obſervable, that we do not find in

any

any parts of the ſcriptures, that the doctrines of religion are ever laid down as mere ſpeculative principles, but are always introduced, either as motives to the practice of ſome duty, or as grounds of peace and comfort to our minds. And if this is the conſtant ſtrain of the ſcriptures, it is an inſtructive leſſon to us what ought to be the ſtrain of our preaching. If the word of God has connected the doctrines and the practice of religion together, it muſt be our indiſpenſable duty never to ſeparate them. And indeed there cannot be a better or higher encomium made upon the ſacred ſcriptures, than this, that they are totally practical.

In like manner, let us conſider ourſelves as lying under an equally indiſpenſable obligation to preach the morality of the goſpel, on the principles, and in the way and manner, in which Jeſus and his apoſtles, our unerring guides, have taught it. Agreeably to our Saviour's doctrine, let us always remember, that a regard to God is the firſt commandment of the law, and the higheſt obligation upon the human mind; and therefore, piety muſt not be inculcated merely as a mean towards an end, but as an end itſelf. The influence of devout regards to God on all the other parts of our duty, ſuch as ſtrengthening the ſocial diſpoſitions, and enforcing the obligation of every branch of virtue, is acknowledged to be highly valuable: but we muſt not place the whole value of piety on this influence, however real and important it may be. Piety is a primary

and eſſential part of duty in itſelf, conſidered as independent of its effects on the other virtues of the Chriſtian life; and as it is an original and eſſential part of duty, it is equally eſſential to our happineſs. We cannot conceive any ſtate, or any ſtage of exiſtence, in which a dependent being can be happy without juſt views of its Maker, and the exerciſe of proper diſpoſitions towards him. On the other hand, all the other virtues of the Chriſtian life muſt be taught as parts, or inſtances of the duty which we owe to God. Doing the will of God, or keeping the commandments of God, is the general view under which our Saviour and his apoſtles have choſen to repreſent the whole duty of man. The commanding ideas of a law, and of a ſupreme lawgiver, to whom we are accountable, and who will reward and puniſh according to our deſerts, are abſolutely neceſſary for mankind, a ſet of creatures liable to be ſeduced from their duty and happineſs by the impulſes of a thouſand irregular paſſions.

All the other views under which human duty can be conceived, ſuch as ſomething intrinſically excellent, as ſomething perfectly beautiful, becoming, or honourable, or as entire propriety of ſentiment and behaviour, and ſuch like, as carry no reference to the will and authority of God, are quite unfit to govern ſuch creatures as mankind, or perhaps any created beings, in any ſtate, or any ſtage of their exiſtence. And as that kind of virtue which diſclaims all dependence on any thing beyond itſelf,

self, is quite unsuitable to the subjects of God; so whatever air of strength, of purity and disinterestedness, it may put on, will be found to be incapable to support itself in all trials, and to be accompanied with a certain pride and self-sufficiency, quite inconsistent with the character of dependent beings, and with that disinterestedness of which it boasts.

Again, When we inculcate the morals of Christianity, let us take care to follow that order in which our Saviour, who knew the nature of man, and all the natural connections of things, has placed them. We read that he began his gospel with a solemn call to repentance; the first maxim of his divine sermon on the mount is, "Blessed are the poor in spi-"rit;" and in other parts of the gospel-history, we find him assuring us in the most solemn manner, "that unless we humble our-"selves, and become as little children, we can-"not enter into the kingdom of God." These things plainly intimate, that in his view of things, which was always according to truth, humility is the true foundation of all other virtues. That clear views, and habitual impressions of our condition, as dependent, frail, indigent, mortal, and as corrupted and guilty creatures, are the true sources of humility, will be readily admitted.

It will also appear evident to every one who gives the least degree of attention to the workings of the human heart, that as soon as the mind is brought under these humbling views

of

of itſelf, it eaſily and naturally flows out in acts of piety and devotion to God, and in emotions of pity, tenderneſs, and charity, to mankind. It were eaſy to ſhow, that the humble temper of mind carries a natural propenſion to equity of diſpoſition and behaviour, to meekneſs, candour, and forgiveneſs, to patience and contentment with our lot in the world, and to moderation under the greateſt flow of worldly proſperity. It is likewiſe obvious, without a particular illuſtration, that the humble ſtate of mind naturally corrects and reſtrains the exceſſes and irregularities of ſelf-love and ſelf-will, which are the fruitful parents of pride, hatred, malice, envy, and of the whole tribe of unſocial and malignant paſſions. That the humble mind is beſt diſpoſed for receiving the glad tidings of the goſpel, can ſcarcely be doubted. Now, ſurely, that ſtate of mind which is ſo favourable to the exerciſe of all the finer diſpoſitions, and which checks and ſuppreſſes the baſer ones, muſt not only be conſiſtent with the exerciſe of the more ſhining virtues of love to a country, public ſpirit, patriotiſm, magnanimity, generoſity, heroiſm, and the reſt of that order, but muſt be the beſt foundation on which they can be raiſed. Some perſons who pretend to be philoſophers, have ſo confounded all their moral notions, as to imagine humility and greatneſs of mind are inconſiſtent, and even to repreſent humility as connected with meanneſs and baſeneſs of ſpirit. That there is no foundation for this charge, will manifeſtly

manifeſtly appear, if we conſider, *firſt*, That the true notion of meanneſs or baſeneſs in a man, is ſomething in his ſentiment and behaviour below the dignity of his nature; and, *next*, That one of the principal ſources of humility, is a conſciouſneſs that we are ſinners, or that we fall below that ſtandard of moral perfection which is ſet before us in the law of God, and in conformity to which our higheſt honour and dignity conſiſts. Now to aſſert, that a man who carries about with him the pureſt ſtandard of moral conduct, and mourns over every inſtance in which he departs from it, muſt upon that account be inclined to think and act in a way below the dignity of his nature, ſeems to be a very unphiloſophical kind of reaſoning. To make uſe of a ſimilar inſtance, it is juſt as if one ſhould aſſert, that a man who has formed the pureſt and higheſt ideal notion of what is juſt and excellent in writing, muſt for that very reaſon be mean and groveling in his compoſitions. The more accurately we obſerve the operations of the human heart, and the connections betwixt the diſpoſitions of it, we ſhall be ſo much the more fully perſuaded, that it is the ſoundeſt philoſophy, as well as ſound divinity, that genuine humility is the true ſoil in which all the other virtues muſt be planted, and in which alone they can thrive and grow up to their full maturity and perfection.

As humility has ſuch an extenſive influence on all the other virtues, as it is ſuch a fundamental

mental article in the moral ſyſtem of the goſpel, and ſo little regarded, if not entirely omitted, in other ſyſtems of morality, either ancient or modern, not copied from it; allow me to illuſtrate further what has been ſaid, by contraſting with it a character formed in a different or rather oppoſite way. Let us ſuppoſe a man, (and many ſuch there are), who never ſeriouſly attended to the truth of his nature and condition; who has never reflected in earneſt, that he is on a level with the loweſt of mankind in all important reſpects, and who never felt any humbling impreſſions of himſelf; but whoſe attention in the courſe of his education, has been turned to the contemplation of the dignity of human nature, the intrinſic excellence of the more ſtriking virtues, and upon the renown and glory they bring along with them wherever they appear: what will be the natural effects of ſuch a habit of thinking? No doubt the perſon will feel a high ardor for moral qualities, actions, and characters of a certain kind and order. He will expreſs great admiration of them, and on ſome occaſions he will exhibit them in his conduct; but the more private and leſs ſhowy virtues will excite in him little ardor or admiration. Vanity, ſelf-conceit, and contempt of others, will ſecretly mingle with his beſt actions, and even break out in ſome degree, and in ſome inſtances. As ſelf-love and ſelf-will have not been ſubdued by impreſſions and habits of humility, they will tranſgreſs their juſt bounds, and keep the man,

in

in ſome degree, under the dominion of ſelfiſh and unfriendly paſſions. Several real and important virtues will be very weak, or entirely wanting, ſuch as piety, equity of diſpoſition, moderation of mind in proſperity, patience in adverſity, and contentment with his condition and lot in life. And thus the character becomes very mixed and imperfect. He will indeed on ſome occaſions put the more ſplendid kind of virtues in practice, but theſe will be only like jets of water from a muddy and corrupted well, which, though they appear clear and bright, by the reflection of the ſun-beams while they paſs through the air, yet they really carry along with them a mixture of the mud and corruption of the bottom from which they were raiſed. Thus I hope it appears, that it is a matter of real importance, that we inculcate the morality of the goſpel, on the principles of the goſpel, and in the manner and order it directs.

Time will not allow me to treat more particularly the importance of enforcing the moral duties of life, from the peculiar motives divine revelation ſuggeſts. Let us ſtudy human nature, and ſtudy the doctrines of the goſpel, and we ſhall find that they tally to one another: and as, in this ſtudy, we ſhall be employed in that way which our duty and the propriety of our character requires, ſo we ſhall find the true ſources of Chriſtian oratory will open themſelves to our view.

To conclude, Let us who are the miniſters

of

of the goſpel, beware of ſatisfying ourſelves, with admiring and extolling the excellency of the goſpel-morality; but let it be our chief care, to copy the perfect pattern of our great Maſter, in all the virtues of his life, and eſpecially in that meekneſs and humility which he exemplified in the character of an inſtructor, and has enjoined us to imitate in the ſame character. "Learn of me," ſays he, "for I "am meek and lowly in heart." He manifeſted the full power of this bleſſed diſpoſition, in that unruffled ſweetneſs and mildneſs, with which he bore the ſlowneſs of underſtanding, the unbelief, and the many weakneſſes of his own diſciples, as well as all the outrages and provocations of his moſt inveterate enemies. As meekneſs ought to adorn our whole behaviour, ſo it ſhould particularly ſhine forth in our public, and even in our private inſtructions. A ſmall degree of acquaintance with the world, and of inſight into human nature, will convince us, that every thing unfriendly, every thing biting and ſatirical, every tincture of the ſour and angry paſſions, appearing in our ſentiments, our words, or even our manner and geſture; as it is contrary to the meek ſpirit of the goſpel and its author, ſo it muſt hurt the good effect of the beſt inſtructions we can give: "Inſtruct," ſays the apoſtle, "thoſe "who oppoſe themſelves, in meekneſs." Let us be particularly careful to cheriſh kind, friendly, and candid thoughts and deſigns towards our brethren; and keep at the utmoſt

diſtance from all ungenerous or unjuſt inſinuations, which tend to leſſen their character or uſefulneſs. Let us always be ſo much on our guard as never to ſpeak a word, or write a line, that can mark the leaſt departure from the kind, meek, and candid ſpirit of our holy religion. If we are not, the more diſcerning part of mankind, at leaſt, will conclude, that our hearts muſt be under very bad diſcipline, when we cannot, during the time of the compoſition, or delivery, of a ſermon, ſuppreſs the workings of the little, the ſelfiſh, and party paſſions. Beſides, they will be apt to ſay, and not without ſome foundation, that though the ſpeaker or writer intended, indeed, only to draw a picture of others, not at all to their advantage, yet he hath really drawn a truer and blacker one of his own heart.

In like manner, let us imitate the humility of our great Maſter. In order to this, we muſt watch over our own tempers, leſt we inſenſibly ſet too great a value on our ſtation, our parts, our learning, or labours; and, at the ſame time, we muſt watch over our behaviour, ſo that true humility may diſcover itſelf in our intercourſe with all ranks of men, the loweſt as well as the higheſt. As the lower claſſes of men muſt always compoſe the greateſt part of the body of mankind, whom we are called to inſtruct; if we contemn thoſe for whom our inſtructions and labours are principally deſigned, we can never diſcharge our duty to them with faithfulneſs

or ſucceſs. It ought further to be conſidered, that our humility ought to appear in the manner in which we hold and deliver our ſentiments and opinions. There is a pulpit-modeſty, which is very beautiful and engaging; as there is a pulpit-pride, extremely diſagreeable and diſguſting. Nothing can make a more odious appearance, than pride preaching up humility, and a man deſcribing himſelf as exceeding little, when it plainly appears he has an idea of himſelf as exceeding great. In order to preſerve a proper modeſty as to our notions and ſentiments about things of doubtful diſputation, and the circumſtantials of religion, and to abate that poſitiveneſs in our own way, which is ſo oppoſite to real humility, and which leads us to complain of the pride of other mens underſtandings, when there is no other reaſon for the charge, than that they cannot adopt our notions or phraſes; let us ſeriouſly aſk ourſelves the following queſtions. Can I pretend to a clearer underſtanding, to a more diligent and impartial inquiry into revelation, or to greater degrees of divine illumination, than all others who differ in opinion from me? What grounds have I to imagine I am in the full poſſeſſion of all divine truths? Do I not acknowledge that I may err? What ſecurity then have I that I do not actually err, in ſome inſtances, amidſt the multitude of opinions which I hold? May I not be in a miſtake, nay, in many miſtakes, though I am not conſcious of the particular

ticular inſtances? Is there not ground to expect, that the admiſſion into the regions of perfect light, will prove not only an enlargement, but a correction, of former views, to men of the wiſeſt, beſt, and faireſt minds? Such queſtions, ſeriouſly put, and urged upon our own conſciences, in ſilence and retirement, and under the awful impreſſion of the preſence of the great Searcher of hearts, would naturally check that preſumptuous confidence, that our own particular views are certainly right, which is ſo common in the world, and ſo frequently accompanied with that "wrath of man, "which never works the righteouſneſs of "God." Such ſerious ſoliloquies, would lead us to ſuſpect, that we are departing from the meekneſs and humility of the goſpel-ſpirit, when we allow ourſelves to think and to ſpeak hardly of others, becauſe they do not ſee every thing juſt in the ſame light with us, or have not freedom to expreſs themſelves in our phraſes, which are, perhaps, not only unſcriptural, but were unknown in the Chriſtian church for many centuries, and can claim no better, nor higher original, than the dregs of the ſcholaſtic philoſophy. There may be phraſes not ſtrictly ſcriptural, which muſt be acknowledged to be venerable by their hoary antiquity; but even theſe ought not to be too much urged upon honeſt and tender minds. May what has been ſaid have its due weight and influence upon all of us.

We now conclude the whole with the apoſtolic direction: "Let us meditate on theſe "things, let us give ourſelves wholly to them, "that our profiting may appear unto all: Let "us take heed unto ourſelves, and to our doc-"trine, continuing in them; for in ſo doing we "ſhall ſave ourſelves, and them that hear us."

SER-

SERMON XIV.

The counsel of Gamaliel considered.

By Robert Dick, D. D.

Preached before the society in Scotland for propagating Christian Knowledge, Jan. 4. 1762.

Acts, v. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39.

Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space,

And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves, what ye intend to do as touching these men.

For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be some body, to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain, and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

After this man rose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished, and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel, or this work, be of men, it will come to nought:

But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

THis wise counsel was occasioned by a celebrated event. Jesus of Nazareth, who had assumed the character of the Jewish Messiah, published a new doctrine, and gained several proselytes; after a public trial, had been condemned to death, as an impostor, and crucified at Jerusalem, in the sight of the whole

nation. The ignominious death of their leader, gave reaſon to expect the diſperſion of his adherents, and the extinction of his doctrine. But theſe hopes were diſappointed. The followers of Jeſus, although they were perſons of the loweſt rank, and had diſcovered ſtrong marks of fear during his trial and execution, were animated with amazing courage after his death. They boldly charged the Jewiſh magiſtrates with the blood of the Meſſiah; declared him to be raiſed from the dead by the power of God; and advanced to a ſtate of high authority and glory; wherein he would diſpenſe the moſt important bleſſings to all his diſciples. They claimed the character of witneſſes choſen for atteſting his hiſtory, and that of perſons commiſſioned to teach his doctrine; producing, for their vouchers, the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghoſt which reſided with them. Theſe bold pretenſions alarmed the rulers of the nation, and engaged them in anxious deliberation about the means of ſecuring the public tranquillity, and preventing the growth of this infant ſect. To keep them at a diſtance from harſh meaſures, is the object of an experienced counſellor, in the words of the text; who demonſtrates, by recent examples, drawn from their own hiſtory, and by maxims of acknowledged wiſdom, that, in the preſent caſe, violent counſels would prove either needleſs or ineffectual: *I ſay unto you, Refrain from theſe men, and let them alone: for if this counſel, or this work, be of men, it will come to nought: but*

if

if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it. If this new ſyſtem be the effect of fraud or deluſion, it muſt ſoon come to nought, as it wants thoſe advantages which are eſſential to the ſucceſs of an impoſture: but if it ſpring from a higher origin, equally vain and impious will be all oppoſition, to a religion ſupported by the power of God.

Such were the reflections of wiſe men, when the Chriſtian religion firſt appeared; and when the competition was between power, policy, and learning, on the one ſide, and a few men of low rank, and mean education, on the other; who, notwithſtanding thoſe diſadvantages, undertook to ſpread their doctrine over the whole earth. If any of us had been preſent in that famous council, could we have reaſonably embraced a different opinion, and conceived how an impoſture, in ſuch hands, and under ſuch circumſtances, ſhould ſpread for many ages, and at laſt get poſſeſſion of the whole civilized world? After the experience of ſeventeen hundred years, when the goſpel hath been adorned with ſo many triumphs, ſhall we form a contrary judgement, and believe, that ſtill "this counſel, or this work, is "of men, and will come to nought?" May we not entertain a more delightful perſuaſion, that this religion, which hath ſtood ſuch ſevere trials, and overthrown ſo many enemies, was not introduced without a divine interpoſition, nor afterwards ſupported without a favourable providence, and ſhall, from the ſame cauſes,

continue

continue throughout all ages? For confirming these agreeable hopes, let us observe,

1. Some circumstances which distinguish this religion in its rise and early progress, from all others that have yet appeared: And then consider,

2. How far the present situation of the world, and the visible dispositions of Providence, seem to promise the propagation and continuance of it.

This argument, ever comfortable to sincere Christians, becometh peculiarly seasonable, when their fears have been alarmed by the apostasy of some persons from the profession of the gospel, and by the profligacy, the lukewarmness and indifference of too many who continue in it. Under such discouraging circumstances, it becometh us, on proper occasions, to review the foundations of our religion, and the reasons why we believe this blessed institution shall flourish to the most remote generations.

I. Our Saviour entered upon his grand undertaking, as a person commissioned from Heaven; who, for his success, relied only upon the power of God. He possessed none of that authority which is derived from rank, power, or learning; which, in special conjunctures, hath misled the credulity of men; but was born of mean parents, enjoyed no public character, and had not received a learned education.

The

The hiſtory of the period in which Jeſus appeared, is inconſiſtent with any deſign of changing the public religion, or with a concert among men of wiſdom and authority for introducing a ſalutary deception among the people. The Jews and the Romans united their zeal againſt the goſpel; which, in different views, was odious to each of them: "Kings of the "earth ſet themſelves, and the rulers took "counſel together, againſt the Lord, and a-"gainſt his Anointed *." But vain was all oppoſition to the decrees of Heaven. Every obſtacle vaniſhed before the Almighty: "The "valleys were exalted, the mountains and hills "were made low; the crooked was made "ſtraight, and the rough places plain: and "the glory of the Lord was revealed †." In this reſpect, Chriſtians, the author of our religion diſtinguiſheth himſelf from thoſe famous lawgivers, who, with the indulgence of their diſcerning countrymen, have beſtowed a divine origin upon human conſtitutions, to render them more venerable in the eyes of the people. Jeſus was no lawgiver except in the houſe of God; and inſtead of aid or connivance, met with the moſt violent and concerted oppoſition, from the public power and wiſdom of his country.

As we cannot aſcribe the introduction of our religion to a meaſure of policy, as little can we refer it to the ordinary arts of impoſture. Theſe generally make application to

* Pſal. ii. 2. † Iſ. xl. 4. 5.

the

the intereſt, the ambition, or other worldly paſſions of a few men; who being once heartily engaged, find little difficulty in ſpreading their opinions. A man of courage and intrigue, who, in an unſettled period, forms a plauſible ſcheme of ſeizing the ſovereignty of his country, will never want accomplices ready to favour any cheat that can facilitate his enterpriſe. In this way, chiefly, did the great prophet of the Eaſt, riſe to his ſpiritual and worldly empire. The uſurpation was the ultimate object of the impoſture; and the proſpect of power to be communicated with his favourites, was a motive that naturally allured proſelytes, and laid the foundation of a thriving party. When to this leading circumſtance we add the rude ſtate of the people amongſt whom this deceit was firſt broached, the dextrous uſe made of the Jewiſh and Chriſtian revelations, and the artful compliances with the prevailing paſſions of that country, it is eaſy to conceive the ſucceſs of a prophet, who was ſoon to become a conſiderable prince, and poſſeſs the means of rewarding his diſciples. The ſpiritual and ſecular authority being once lodged in the ſame hands, is it to be wondered at, that a ſtate riſing to power by favourable conjunctures, and the common arts of policy, ſhould extend her dominion and religion by the ſame means? But what reſemblance do you find here to the goſpel of Chriſt? Doth the character of Jeſus, or of the religion which he publiſhed, bring to your thoughts

thoughts the wisdom of this world? Did he promise to his followers, power, wealth, or pleasure? Did he use any condescension to the passions of men, and court their favour, by an indulgence to their vices? Did he claim for himself any temporal pre-eminence, or accommodate his doctrines to such a design? "If any man will come after me, let him deny "himself, and take up his cross, and follow "me *." "The foxes have holes, and the "birds of the air have nests; but the Son of "man hath not where to lay his head †." "The princes of the Gentiles exercise domi-"nion over them, and they that are great, ex-"ercise authority upon them. But it shall not "be so among you: but whosoever will be "great among you, let him be your minister; "and whosoever will be chief among you, let "him be your servant. Even as the Son of "man came not to be ministered unto, but to "minister, and to give his life a ransom for "many ‡." "My kingdom is not of this "world ‖." Is this the language of an impostor, or of a prophet of God? Did Mahomet address his countrymen in such a strain? Was not his "kingdom of this world," and did not his "servants fight" for him? How unlike to him, who "for this cause came into the world, "that he might bear witness to the truth **!"

* Matth. xvi. 24. † Matth. viii. 20.
‡ Matth. xx. 25. 26. 27. 28. ‖ John, xviii. 36.
** John, xviii. 37.

and

and be the conductor of men to eternal happineſs; nor ever polluted this divine ambition with the leaſt tincture of worldly project?

If the firſt ſucceſs of the goſpel was neither owing to the devices of political wiſdom, nor to the arts of impoſture working upon worldly paſſions, have we any other reſource in the folly, credulity, or enthuſiaſm of our ſpecies, which will explain this appearance, without calling in the power of God? Here we meet with the triumphs of infidelity, and are preſented with a pompous diſplay of thoſe falſe religions which have prevailed in the world. Theſe, though the offspring of impoſture or enthuſiaſm, yet, by ſpecious pretenſions to a divine original, have, in their turns, inſulted human reaſon, and at this moment fill the greateſt part of the earth: nor is there any other ſecurity againſt ſuch deluſions, if we believe our adverſaries, than a fixed reſolution to reject all claims to divine inſpiration. If ſupernatural works are produced in ſupport of them, this pretended proof is the ſureſt mark of fraud, and ſhould determine every wiſe man to diſregard both miracles and doctrine, without further inquiry. Are theſe the reflections "of truth and ſober-"neſs," or of a prejudiced mind? Becauſe falſe revelations have been pretended, are we ſure that God hath never communicated, in a ſupernatural way, his will to mankind? Becauſe counterfeit and forged miracles have been obtruded upon the world, in order to ſupport the avarice and ambition of particular

perſons or ſocieties, ſhall we conclude, that God never, in any inſtance, interrupted the courſe of nature, or ſtamped the ſeals of his power upon the manifeſtations of his pleaſure to men? Is human nature ſo happily ſituated in this world, and ſo ſecure with regard to its future condition, as to need no other guidance or conſolation than what may be derived from the light of nature? Is it impoſſible, that the gracious Father of the world ſhould make any addition to the dictates of nature, and give a more full diſcovery of his deſigns, in anſwer to the earneſt wiſhes and hopes of his much-favoured creatures? Do the different religions that prevail in the world, ſtand ſo much upon a level, as to merit no ſeparate conſideration? Do any ſyſtems of religion, the Jewiſh and Chriſtian being excepted, pretend to be founded in miracles, recorded by thoſe who were eye-witneſſes of thoſe miracles, or who lived at the time when thoſe miracles were wrought? Amongſt all the acknowledged deluſions which have overſpread the world, did any one ever take riſe from a courſe of pretended miracles? Do not Jeſus and the prophets, in whom Chriſtians believe, and they alone, make appeals to miracles for the vouching of their commiſſion from God? We have often heard of the wonderful effects of enthuſiaſm; that perſons under this influence have embraced the wildeſt opinions, adhered to them with obſtinacy, and fallen martyrs to abſurdity and deluſion. The fact is undeniable. What is the reaſon of it?

In matters of opinion, men frequently err, and retain their falſe judgements, with the ſame firmneſs as they do the truth. But is this found to be the caſe in matters of fact? Was it ever known, that twelve perſons, of mean education, and plain character, formed a conſiſtent narrative of numerous facts which never exiſted, perſiſted in it to the laſt, without confeſſion or detection, and ſealed the atteſtation with their blood? If Jeſus had wrought no miracles, but reſted the credit of his miſſion upon the prophecies of the Old Teſtament, or upon inward illuminations and viſions, he had wanted one character expected in the Meſſiah; and the Jews, according to his own declaration, had been excuſable in their unbelief. Opinions derived from interpretation and deduction, leave room for miſtake; and all pretences to viſions, or divine illumination, open a wide field for fraud and deluſion: but our Saviour recurred to a teſt which no impoſtor ever ſubmitted to with impunity: "The works that I do in my Father's "name, they bear witneſs of me. If I do not "the works of my Father, believe me not. "But if I do, though ye believe not me, be"lieve the works *." In vain are objected the Heathen and the Popiſh miracles, which bear no reſemblance to thoſe of Jeſus and his apoſtles, nor in any degree weaken the foundations of our religion. The ſuperſtitions of the

* John, x. 25. 37. 38.

Heathen

Heathen never boaſted of this foundation; nor do their miracles, whether real or fictitious, ſtand connected with any religious ſyſtem. Thoſe ſuppoſed to have happened in Roman-Catholic countries, were performed, not as proofs of a new religion, but of one already eſtabliſhed; not before unbelievers, but devotees; not in ſupport of a ſcheme of piety and ſevere morals, interfering in many reſpects with the ſecular intereſts of thoſe by whom they were performed, but in manifeſt ſubordination to the wealth and power of the Romiſh eſtabliſhment, and in direct contradiction to that ſacred record which all Chriſtians acknowledge to be the ſtandard of their common faith. To which we muſt add, that the fraud, and the method of managing it, hath, in many inſtances, been detected. With what candour, then, is our religion likened to thoſe deluſions which have amuſed the credulity of men? Do we ſee in Jeſus a legiſlator, impoſing upon his fellow-citizens, from motives of private ambition, or public utility? or a deceiver, aiming plainly at wealth and power, and engaging aſſociates to promote a fraud that will afford an ample recompence? or an enthuſiaſt, who from falſe interpretations of ſcripture, inconcluſive reaſonings, inward illuminations and viſions, being firſt deceived himſelf, afterwards deceiveth others? The Chriſtian revelation, according to the hiſtory of it, ſtands upon no foundation of this ſort; but upon one peculiar to itſelf, to which no religion on earth ever

laid claim, if we except that which is profeſſed by the Jewiſh nation. Acknowledge this foundation, the riſe and progreſs of our religion is plain, and accounted for: the cauſe bears a proportion to the effect. Withdraw it, the whole becometh dark and inexplicable. In ſhort, without an interpoſition of the divine arm, the world had never beheld the triumphant progreſs of the goſpel over ſo many nations, while it wanted thoſe favourable circumſtances which alone can give ſucceſs to an impoſture. "If it had been of men," long ago "would it have come to nought;" but "be-"cauſe it was of God, it could not be over-"thrown;" and we truſt, for the ſame reaſon, never will be overthrown. Which leads me to conſider,

II. How far the preſent ſituation of the world, and the viſible diſpoſitions of Providence, ſeem to promiſe the propagation and continuance of it.

When our religion was firſt publiſhed, under the diſadvantages that attended it, men might naturally conclude, that nothing but the bleſſing of God, and the powerful operation of his providence, could procure for it an eſtabliſhment in the world. But now that it hath ſpread ſo far, eſcaped ſo many dangers, foiled ſuch powerful enemies, and ſubjected the greateſt empires to its influence, the extinction of it would be as ſurpriſing, as were its introduction and firſt progreſs. Irregular conduct,

or

or an unhappy turn of thought, may render this inſtitution diſtaſteful to individuals; but its public authority is likely to continue and ſpread, without an unfavourable interpoſition of the Almighty, which no Chriſtian apprehendeth, and I ſuppoſe no unbeliever will rely upon. Some remarkable circumſtances, in the preſent ſituation of the world, give reaſonable hopes that our religion will ſoon viſit diſtant nations, and be ſettled among them upon a more ſecure foundation than in any former period. As this event would furniſh an additional argument of divine favour towards Chriſtianity, ſo would it likewiſe give a natural ſecurity for its duration, notwithſtanding any local or temporary decline from particular cauſes. The preſent courſe of empire and commerce, opens a delightful proſpect to every ſerious obſerver. As it taketh riſe from nations enlightened by true religion and valuable ſcience, and ſpreadeth into Heathen and Mahometan countries, thoſe remote regions are inſpired with veneration for an inſtitution, which is adopted by men ſuperior to themſelves, and is found in company with ſo many improvements. Perſons who in ſome views are indifferent about our religion, become intereſted in its propagation, and will not neglect what they know to be the moſt ſacred bond of union among men, and conducive to the ſucceſs of their ſecular projects. When, therefore, we behold the whole Chriſtian world convinced, as by inſpiration, that an extenſive commerce

with distant nations, is the only sure fountain of wealth and dominion, and straining all their faculties to acquire this treasure, which cannot be done effectually without spreading the gospel; do we not see the all-wise God taking into his own service the interest and the ambition of men, the most universal, and the most powerful principles of human action, and rendering them the instruments of his own glory? How weak are the devices of men; and how infallible the counsels of God! How inexhaustible are the resources of the Most High, for accomplishing his gracious purposes, while he employeth not only the virtues and the talents of his servants, but the vices and the worldly views of men which have long dishonoured religion where it hath been planted, to diffuse it unto unknown regions, and render the name of the Redeemer glorious over the whole earth! "O the depth of the riches of the "wisdom and knowledge of God! how un-"searchable are his judgements, and his ways "past finding out *!"

While the gospel is gradually enlightening the dark places of the earth, it would be melancholy to see those nations which have long enjoyed its salutary influence, become insensible to their happiness. From this quarter, however, the justest fears of Christians are thought to arise. Men are apt to grow weary of the greatest blessings, and from the love of novelty, the affectation of distinction, and

* Rom. xi. 33.

sometimes

ſometimes from vicious diſpoſitions, to undervalue the religion of their fathers; to cheriſh doubts about the truth of it; and at laſt, either to diſbelieve, or to become perfectly indifferent whether it be true or falſe. When we ſuppoſe the profligate, the indifferent, and the unbelieving, to be all combined againſt our holy faith, and to be poſſeſſed of ſuch advantages as add weight to their opinions and example, the ſituation of the Chriſtian church appears to be almoſt deſperate: but a more mature conſideration of theſe appearances will diminiſh our fears, and ſatisfy us, that although ſuch characters themſelves be deſtitute of religious comforts, their influence cannot prove fatal to a public profeſſion, nor endanger any eſtabliſhment that ſupporteth it. Be pleaſed to obſerve them more particularly.

Men openly vicious and immoral, can derive no credit upon any ſcheme of opinions or practices, but diſgrace every ſtandard under which they are ranged. They are ſeldom conſulted in modelling a church, or in framing inſtitutions of civil government. Their character diſqualifieth them for ſuch employment: and ſhould they, by the unſearchable order of Providence, be placed at the head of human affairs, as hath often been the caſe, their deſigns cannot be carried into execution, without the aſſiſtance of others who are probably of a different diſpoſition, and will diſappoint their impious counſels. Beſides, the paſſions of a vicious man are ſeldom gratified by changing

the

the religion of his country. Particular indulgences are his only object, which he generally obtains by less invidious means. Religion is beheld with veneration, even by the wicked, who are often willing to efface their crimes, by the most zealous encouragement of public piety; and sacred institutions are ever the last thing attacked by the most wanton and cruel tyranny. In the revolutions of this fluctuating world, religious systems have generally ascended from the subjects to the sovereign; and in those few cases where the throne may be thought rather to have given than received a religion, it was never filled by a profligate prince *. Such characters, either continue in their old profession, or being equally indisposed to all kinds of religion, are distinguished only by their impiety.

* Henry VIII. of England is rather an apparent than a real exception from this observation. Although we should suppose this prince to deserve the character here mentioned, which is a questionable point; yet could he not be deemed to have changed the public religion. His passions carried him to abolish the Papal jurisdiction in England, and to seize a considerable part of the ecclesiastical revenues; but Henry's reformation proceeded no farther. He continued zealously attached to the ancient doctrines and worship; and persecuted, with his usual violence, every deviation from them, during his whole reign. England, at this period, was not more reformed from the errors of the church of Rome, than France is at present. Besides, it is not intended, in this part of the argument, to distinguish between the different forms under which the same religion appears, but between religious systems that are raised upon distinct and separate foundations.

The

The indifferent are enemies from whom we have ſtill leſs to fear. They are loſt indeed to the Chriſtian church; but they introduce no other ſyſtem, and leave the eſtabliſhed faith in full ſecurity.

The oppoſition of unbelievers, which may ſeem the moſt alarming, is leſs to be dreaded than is commonly thought. Having no other religion to put in competition with Chriſtianity, their zeal becometh ineffectual, through the want of a determinate object. They will never revive the ſuperſtitions of the Heathen. As little regard have they for the religion of Mahomet. Claiming itſelf a divine original, and allowing the ſame honour to Chriſtianity, it can find no admirers among thoſe who reject all pretences to inſpiration. Shall our religion then come to an end, without any other ſubſtituted in its room? or ſhall the religion of nature be at laſt declared ſufficient for the direction and the comfort of human life; and all additions, either to the matters it contains, or to the evidence upon which it is founded, be deemed ſuperfluous? This ſuppoſition can proceed from thoſe only who admit into their ſyſtem the belief of a particular Providence, and of a future ſtate of retribution; about which intereſting points, thoſe who reject the goſpel are not yet agreed. Even after this ſuppoſition, may we not be allowed to aſk, in what age or country this religion ever prevailed, without the aid of poſitive inſtitutions? Should theſe be added to natural religion, by the

the moſt reſpectable authority upon earth, in order to unite men in a public profeſſion; how unequal would be the competition, between a creature of human policy, which is but of yeſterday, and a plan of inſtitutions, venerable from their antiquity, and conſecrated by the belief of a divine original? But with what propriety can we ſtate an oppoſition between the religion of nature and the goſpel of Chriſt? Is not every article of the former incorporated into the latter? And what is there, in the whole compaſs of Chriſtianity thus completed, that can be unacceptable to the ſons of men? Can it diſpleaſe them to ſee the dictates of nature confirmed by the teſtimony of God himſelf? the doctrines ſhe taught concerning God and Providence, and all the joyful hopes ſhe ever gave her children, improved and ſtrengthened? Can men take exception at that effuſion of divine light, and thoſe gracious offers of mercy, which ſo well ſuit the neceſſities of a dark and ſinful ſtate? Doth the ignorant object againſt inſtruction? the criminal againſt a pardon? the ſlave of ſin againſt the liberty of the ſons of God? he who is ſinking under the natural fears of death, againſt the hopes of a reſurrection to eternal life? "How can theſe "things be?" The myſteries of our religion, which could not have been diſcovered without a divine revelation, and the miraculous works upon which it is built, may raiſe diſguſt and ſuſpicions in a few minds, which meditate with too little modeſty upon the ways of God; but

to the far greater part of Christians, even these will appear the ornament and glory of our faith, and prove a principal source of their warmest attachment. Take natural religion, separated from the Christian, without the peculiar institutions, doctrines, and promises of the gospel; and take that same natural religion, supported by the stupendous miracles, adorned with the venerable rites, and animated with the glorious prospects of the gospel; offer each of them to mankind, the one as discovered by the force of human sagacity, and the other as revealed by God himself; ask which system they would chuse for the measure of their conduct, and the foundation of their hopes? We need not hesitate about the answer. The experiment hath been made, and we know the issue: "The foolishness of God proved wiser than "men; and the weakness of God stronger "than men *."

While one class of unbelievers are unable, another, more valuable, we must suppose unwilling to give any obstruction to the gospel of Christ. If you place in this number any who embrace the great articles of natural religion, and believe in a God, a providence, and a future state of retribution; who love mankind, venerate the institutions of their country, and abhor every innovation inconsistent with the public happiness; from such characters our holy faith will be in little danger. They will never set themselves to change the religion of their

* 1 Cor. i. 25.

country,

country, till a conviction of its pernicious tendency, and its loss of credit among the people, have paved the way for this attempt. Of such a conjuncture Christians need not be afraid. The gospel hath hitherto proved victorious over every rival, when the conflict was maintained upon equal terms; nor can an instance be produced, of any nation where this religion, once planted, was afterwards extirpated without the force of arms. In every country where Christianity is established, the body of the people, however negligent of its laws, retain their belief of its divine original, and make the promises contained in it the foundation of their hopes. Till the case be altered, a few exceptions furnish no ground of anxiety. There is no cause to be alarmed by a few speculative men; who, fond of novelty, and eager to distinguish themselves from the rest of mankind, disseminate notions above the comprehension, or repugnant to the common sense, of their fellows, without discretion, and generally without success. Whatever talents or virtues such characters may possess, they are not likely to overthrow the religion of their country.

If, Christians, we profess a religion so consonant to reason, and to the universal anticipations of human nature, that no system which hath yet appeared, could support a competition with it upon equal terms; if we entertain no fears from the power of a conqueror, nor from the success of any new imposture; if natural religion is become a part of the Christian,

every article of the former being incorporated into the latter; if neither the profligate, the indifferent, nor even unbelievers, who preſerve a regard for the happineſs of ſociety, can excite any juſt apprehenſions that the public profeſſion and belief of our religion is coming to an end: arguing from ſecond cauſes, of which only we have treated under this head, we would conclude it to be the will of God, and the determination of his providence, that this religion ſhall not come to nought; and therefore, according to the principle of Gamaliel, that "this counſel and work is not of men." Can the mind of a Chriſtian be more agreeably employed, than in contemplating the perpetuity of that ſpiritual kingdom which God hath erected among mankind, for diſplaying his wiſdom and goodneſs, recovering and improving his degenerate creatures, and leading them to endleſs happineſs? Can a Chriſtian reflect, without the higheſt joy, that the holy faith which hath deſcended to him from his anceſtors, which hath ſo often refreſhed him with conſolations, and elevated him with the moſt glorious hopes, ſhall ſpread its influence ſtill wider, and extend its bleſſings to the moſt remote ages? that the church of God, the depoſitary of his laws and promiſes, which hath ſtood unmoved under many a ſtorm, ſhall ſtill, notwithſtanding "the winds that blow, and "the rains that deſcend," continue fixed "like "Mount Zion, that cannot be moved?"

The promiſe of God is, without queſtion,

the most solid foundation for the faith of a Christian. Whoever recals to his thoughts the declaration of our Saviour, "That his church "is built upon a rock; and that the gates of "hell shall not prevail against it *;" and that "he will be with his servants unto the end of "the world †," while they are employed in supporting and propagating his religion, can entertain no doubt that these declarations will be accomplished, either by the miraculous interposition of God, or by the ordinary course of his providence. It is, however, an additional comfort when a Christian observeth the particular steps and arrangements of providence, by which God accomplisheth his gracious purposes. By these meditations our faith is strengthened, and we acquire the joyful assurance, that while we are engaged in spreading our holy religion, we are supported by the divine providence, and are fellow-workers with God. To this honourable character the society for propagating Christian knowledge are justly intitled. This worthy body have chosen for the object of their association, the noble design of diffusing, among their fellow-creatures, the knowledge of God, and his Son Jesus Christ. Distant nations have felt the benefit of their pious zeal, while the uncivilized parts of their own country have justly engaged their more particular attention.

The highlands and islands of Scotland have

* Matth. xvi. 16. † Matth. xxviii. 20.

long

long been diſtinguiſhed from the other parts of Great Britain, by an imperfect knowledge of religion, and a ſlender acquaintance with the arts of life. The difference of manners and language, with an inacceſſible ſituation, had formed an unfortunate partition between the inhabitants of thoſe countries, and their more improved fellow-citizens, which excluded them from thoſe advantages that would naturally have accompanied a freer communication. When the ſouthern provinces were recovered from the errors of Popery, far advanced in uſeful arts, and living under the influence of mild and equitable laws, a great part of the highlanders continued ſtill under the miſeries of ſuperſtition, and barbarous manners, cut off from the benefits of true religion, and a free government. The miniſtrations of their worthy paſtors, with the aſſiſtance of their more enlightened countrymen, although they diminiſhed, were unable to cure thoſe evils; nor had any other means of reformation occurred to the public, when the ſociety already mentioned engaged in this great work. The ſucceſs which hath accompanied their labours, juſtifieth the wiſdom of the deſign, and the prudent methods employed in the execution of it. Making application to that early age which is freeſt from prejudice, and moſt ſuſceptible of good impreſſions, they have been able to prevent thoſe errors and bad habits, which could not, by human means, have been removed in more advanced years. By joining to re-

ligious instruction, some branches of secular education, they have rendered their plan more compleat, and alleviated those prejudices which would have obstructed a reformation purely religious. Even Roman-Catholic parents are reconciled to the design, and with eagerness send their children to schools where they see a foundation laid for their future prosperity in the world. I am authorised to inform this assembly, that 140 schools are, at this present time, maintained by the society; and that, according to the latest reports concerning the state of them, the number of scholars, of both sexes, amounteth to 6693, several of whom, besides being instructed in reading and writing, arithmetic, and church-music, are also taught some kinds of manufacture suited to their circumstances *. Having been lately employed in a public service, I had an opportunity of visiting many of those schools which are settled in the most remote and uncultivated parts of

* His Majesty makes an annual donation of L. 1000, to be employed by the general assembly of the church of Scotland, for the reformation of the highlands and islands, and places where Popery and ignorance prevail. The assembly 1760 appointed some ministers, of which the author of this sermon was one, to visit those countries which are the object of the Royal bounty. The visitors, at the request of the society for propagating Christian knowledge, inquired into the state of the society's schools; and from the ability of the masters, the proficiency of the scholars, and the general disposition of the inhabitants to have their children well educated, were thoroughly convinced, that the most happy effects might be expected from this well-judged charity.

our

our country; and from my own perſonal obſervation, coincident entirely with a public teſtimony of one of my Reverend colleagues from this place, can aſſure the ſociety, that their pious labours are not loſt; and that they are employing the moſt effectual method of curing religious errors and political prejudices, of baniſhing a ſpirit of idleneſs and rapine, of adding uſeful citizens to the commonwealth, and valuable members to the church of God. Nay, there is ground to believe, that the good ſeed ſown in theſe nurſeries of piety and virtue, hath already produced glorious fruits; and that ſome of thoſe gallant men who have appeared with ſo much renown in the cauſe of their country, received from this charity their firſt qualification for this honourable ſervice.

The ſociety need no incitement to perſiſt in their "labours of love." A conſciouſneſs that their endeavours have been ſucceſsful, is at preſent a ſufficient and a glorious reward; and they know, that they ſhall reap ſtill more "abundantly, if they faint not." It would be injurious to ſuppoſe, that ſo noble an undertaking ſhould languiſh through want of encouragement. In an age which abounds in humanity towards every ſpecies of miſery, and in public ſpirit to forward every worthy plan, ſhall hearts or hands be wanting, to reſcue men from the vaſſalage of ſin and Satan, and add new ſubjects to the immortal empire of God, and of his Son Jeſus Chriſt? The great deſigns of the Almighty muſt prove ſucceſsful:

"The floods may lift up their voice, but the "Lord on high is mightier than the noise of "many waters *." The governor of the world can never want instruments to accomplish his own counsels. The little projects of men may succeed or miscarry; the empires of this world may rise and fall in succession; but amidst all the vicissitudes of this lower world, every Christian rests assured, that "the kingdoms of the "earth shall become the kingdoms of God, "and of his Christ." May this blessed period arrive; may "the name of God be hallowed; "may his kingdom come; and his will be done "on earth, as it is done in heaven." *Amen.*

* Psal. xciii. 4.

SER-

SERMON XV.

The influence of piety on the public good.

By ALEXANDER GERARD, D. D.

Preached before the General Aſſembly of the Church of Scotland, May 31. 1761.

DEUT. vi. 24.

——*To fear the Lord our God, for our good always.*

ONE age is diſtinguiſhed from another by no circumſtance more remarkably, than by the particular vices which are predominant, and the particular virtues which are unfaſhionable in it. There is no vice which marks the character of the preſent age more ſtrongly than irreligion. Piety is very generally diſregarded, or allowed to have only a ſmall degree of worth; the moſt unaffected expreſſions of it are ſtudiouſly avoided by many, and profeſſedly ridiculed by ſome. Yet the moſt natural ſentiments of the human heart proclaim, in very intelligible language, that piety is the firſt and nobleſt of the virtues, and has a peculiar prerogative above all the reſt. We are urged to the practice of ſome virtues by our ſtrong ſenſe of their inviolable obligation: we are allured to the love of other virtues by the high approbation

bation of their excellence, which riſes in every well-diſpoſed mind. But piety is equally inforced by both theſe ſentiments. Its obligation is indiſpenſable, and its excellence is ſupreme: it is at once our ſtrict duty, and the greateſt glory of human characters. It has thus a witneſs of its ſingular dignity in the breaſt of every man.

It is not difficult to diſcover the cauſes of that perverſion of ſentiment, which has ſunk piety ſo far below its genuine rank, in the opinion of the preſent generation. It is more difficult to find a remedy for this baſe perverſion. It is doubtleſs, however, worth while to try every method which is likely to have any force. This generation of men lay claim to a great degree of public ſpirit, and deſire to be thought deeply concerned for the intereſts of ſociety: will it then be unallowable, on this occaſion, to addreſs that generous concern for the public good, which *all* profeſs to entertain, in favour of piety, which *ſome* deſpiſe, and *many* totally neglect? Were a perſon to attempt erecting piety at once on its genuine foundation, many would think the attempt unworthy of their notice. Were we to inſiſt on the obligation and propriety of paying ſome regard to infinite perfection; were we to repreſent the excellence of a temper which implies the love of goodneſs, and the ſoundneſs of the whole conſtitution of the ſoul; were we to diſplay the refined joys which are inſeparable from the exerciſe of devout affections, or to

ſpeak

ſpeak of the eternal happineſs with which God will "reward them that diligently ſeek him *;" our arguments might, perhaps, be addreſſed to principles of the human mind which many pretend not to poſſeſs. But when we propoſe to ſhow, that true piety has the ſtrongeſt tendency to promote the public intereſts of ſociety, we beſpeak a principle of action which none would willingly be thought to want; we may reaſonably expect a favourable hearing from all who have truly public ſpirit: and if this principle, or any other principle, ſhould bring men once to regard piety without prejudice, they would ſoon be captivated with its native charms, and become ſolicitous to cultivate it in their hearts.

In the text, Moſes informs the people of Iſrael, that "the Lord commanded them to fear "the Lord their God, for their good always," for their national proſperity. The republic of Iſrael was a theocracy, a polity under the immediate protection of Jehovah; who governed it by a ſpecial providence, and was, in a peculiar ſenſe, the king of this people. But it was not only on this account that piety was conducive to their national proſperity; it is in its own nature unchangeably conducive to the happineſs of every nation. We may exhort every people under heaven "to fear the Lord "for their good."

To fear the Lord, is to be truly pious and religious. In the place of religion men ſubſtitute, ſometimes idle ſuperſtition, conſiſting in

* Heb. xi. 6.

groundleſs

groundleſs terrors, and ſolicitude about things indifferent; and ſometimes bold enthuſiaſm, implying unaccountable and unmeaning fervour. But true piety is diſtinct from both. It is founded on juſt ſentiments of the nature and perfections of God, derived both from his works and from his word, and cheriſhed and rendered habitually preſent to the mind by frequent meditation. It is a temper compounded of reverence, love, gratitude, and ſubmiſſion, towards the greateſt and the beſt of beings, prevailing habitually in the ſoul, and expreſſed in ſincere and regular devotion. The Chriſtian religion repreſents the character of God as in the higheſt degree worthy of all our pious regards, by aſſuring us that he is "God our "Saviour *," by informing us of the ſtupendous diſpenſation of grace for the redemption of the apoſtate world, which he has carried on. It therefore requires theſe regards, raiſed to the greateſt purity and ardor, and exerted in the moſt ſpiritual exerciſes of worſhip, addreſſed to God in the name of Jeſus Chriſt, and animated by the influences of the Holy Spirit.

Such is Chriſtian piety, which, it is our deſign to prove, has the ſtrongeſt tendency to promote the public intereſts of civil ſociety: And after having proved this, we ſhall ſhow what influence the conſideration of it ought to have on all ranks of men.

Firſt, We ſhall prove, that piety has the

* Tit. iii. 4.

ſtrongeſt

ſtrongeſt tendency to promote the public intereſts of civil ſociety.

The great end of religion, doubtleſs, is to fit men for eternity: but it likewiſe fits them for all the duties of the preſent life. The preſent and the future ſtate of human beings are two parts of the ſame whole. We can be rendered happy in the latter only by being uſeful in the former. To employ an appearance of religion as a means of accompliſhing ſecular deſigns, is a baſe proſtitution of religion: but religion ſincerely embraced and ſteadily adhered to for its own ſake, will be the moſt powerful inſtrument of promoting every real worldly intereſt. While it ſeems to aim directly only at rendering the perſon who practiſes it virtuous and happy, it ſpreads peace and felicity through ſociety. The influence of religion on the peace and order of the world is ſo conſpicuous, that its enemies have affected to repreſent it as a mere contrivance of politicians for preſerving peace and order. From its acknowledged *uſefulneſs*, they have attempted to raiſe an hypotheſis for overturning its *truth*. It has been often proved, that the attempt is vain, and the hypotheſis abſurd; but the attempt could not have been made, if the ſingular uſefulneſs of religion in ſociety had not been obvious and undeniable.

There is reaſon to doubt, whether a ſociety could at all ſubſiſt for any conſiderable time, if its members were generally deſtitute of all religious impreſſions. If we examine the ſtate

of

of the moſt barbarous nations, we ſhall find, that their peace and order reſult, in a great meaſure, from ſome religious ſentiments, however imperfect, the want of which could not be ſupplied by any other principle. Were it poſſible to eradicate all ſenſe of religion from the minds of men, ſcarce any thing would be left on which human laws could take hold. When men have any regard to God, the ſupreme governor of the world, they will "be "ſubject to the powers that are ordained of "God, not only for wrath, but alſo for con-"ſcience ſake *." But when they ceaſe to regard rulers as "the miniſters of God †," there can be no longer any ſubjection to their laws for conſcience ſake; wrath is the only remaining motive to ſubjection; and even this motive will be greatly weakened. The ſevereſt ſanctions can have little influence on thoſe who have no ſenſe of God, or of a future ſtate. How inconſiderable is the force of capital puniſhments, when men regard death as only a tranſient pain, the end of all trouble and calamity? Can a perſon have a degree of reſolution ſufficient to qualify him for doing any important ſervice to mankind, who would be reſtrained by the fear of death, if he conſidered it only in this light? The religion of Japan propoſes no future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments. There deſpotic government, ever cruel, ever horrid, has ſurpaſſed itſelf in cruelty. Every law is enacted with unparallelled ſeverity, and executed with

* Rom. xiii. 1. 5. † Verſe 4.

ſhocking barbarity. Yet the laws are deſpiſed, and diſcover their impotence moſt, when they attempt to exert their greateſt force. Without religion, this would be the ſtate of every nation: nothing could make the laws to be revered but the moſt dreadful tortures. Tortures, which chill us with horror, have been *ſometimes* inflicted on *atrocious* criminals. But if religion had not conſiderable power even over the generality of mankind, it would be neceſſary, and perhaps inſufficient likewiſe, to inflict the moſt exquiſite tortures on *every* criminal. Can any perſon be inſenſible, how valuable a bleſſing it is to ſociety, that mild and moderate puniſhments are ſufficient to preſerve its peace? Need I explain the value of this bleſſing to any of the inhabitants of *Britain*, the happy land which has enjoyed it ſo long? Mankind owe the bleſſing only to religion. Is it neceſſary to mention, that even a weak ſenſe of religion ſecures the general practice of many duties, which could never be ſucceſsfully inforced by human laws? What, except religion, can reſtrain men from ſecret crimes? Did not religion ſupply "an oath for confir-"mation *" of human teſtimony, how little could teſtimony often be depended on? And if truth were not regarded as ſacred, in how many inſtances would life, and property, and reputation, be precarious?

Religion has been often debaſed by the groſſ-

* Heb. vi. 16.

eſt corruptions, which have very much weakened its influence on mankind. But the greateſt corruptions of religion could never totally deſtroy its power. A little truth, though almoſt ſtifled by the abſurdeſt tenets, and the vileſt ſuperſtitions, with which it was loaded, has, in ſome meaſure, diſplayed the power of religion to render men good members of ſociety. Some depravations of religion have a very pernicious tendency. Innumerable miſchiefs have ariſen from them. But could we find, in any age, or in any region of the world, an example of a community deſtitute of all religion, we ſhould ſoon be convinced, that the miſchiefs of *irreligion* are incomparably greater, and more deſtructive to ſociety, than all the bad effects which can be charged on *falſe* religion. We have frequent opportunity to obſerve the operation of ſuperſtition in multitudes. This excites our zeal againſt it, a zeal honeſt and laudable in itſelf. But being apt, like every other principle, to become exceſſive or irregular, it makes us often regard with too much indulgence, the far greater horrors of irreligion; which never prevails univerſally; and which acts, for the moſt part, in diſguiſe, and with reſerve, even among the few who give up themſelves to its abſolute ſway. A long catalogue of the ill conſequences of falſe religion may doubtleſs be produced; but could we ſet in oppoſition to it a complete enumeration of the benefits which ſociety has actually derived from very corrupt religions, we ſhould find

find them more numerous and important than thoſe which it derives from any other ſource.

Religion is exhibited in the goſpel of Jeſus, perfectly pure, ſeparated from all corruptions and foreign mixtures. But its purity is debaſed by the imperfections which cleave to its profeſſors in the preſent ſtate; and it is but ſlightly embraced, and incompletely practiſed by them. On this account the Chriſtian religion does not reſtrain and govern men ſo much as might be juſtly expected. It has really, notwithſtanding, much greater influence on the generality, than is commonly imagined. We are accuſtomed to obſerve things going on in a certain courſe. By this means they become ſo familiar to us, that we never inquire from what cauſes they proceed. We ſee men ſubmitting inſenſibly to many reſtraints, without which they could not live together in ſociety. We ſeldom inquire, whence theſe reſtraints ariſe. But if they were traced to their origin, it would appear that very many of them ariſe from religion.—— We are naturally diſpoſed to fix a certain ſtandard of every virtue that enters into a character, and to conſider perſons who fall much below this ſtandard as wholly deſtitute of the virtue. We conſider thoſe alone as intitled to the character of piety, who are poſſeſſed of a greater regard to religion than the generality of mankind. We overlook the lower degrees of this regard, which are to be found in every breaſt. But many who have not a degree of piety ſufficient for

the eternal ſalvation of their own ſouls, have yet ſome regard to the reſtraints of religion, by which their behaviour in ſociety is influenced. All men have ſome imperfect ſenſe of religion, which renders them much fitter for the duties of ſociety than they could be without it. A ſenſe of religion, as it were, grows up with the human mind, and is, if I may uſe the expreſſion, incorporated with it in its very growth. It mixes with our ſeveral operations unperceived, and often actuates our conduct, when we are inſenſible of its force. It eſtabliſhes an habitual turn of mind, which, without our reflecting on it, reſtrains us from many crimes hurtful to ſociety, and prediſpoſes us for ſubmitting to thoſe laws by which the happineſs of the community is ſecured. Civil laws controul only our external actions; but the laws of religion kill the ſeeds of thoſe principles, which, when they are cheriſhed, ſpring up ſlowly and gradually into crimes. Civil laws regulate only that one ſpecies of conduct with reſpect to which they are profeſſedly enacted; but the laws of religion extend their influence to all our principles of action at once.

If religion has in its very nature ſo great a tendency to ſtrengthen all the ties of civil government, and if ſociety does actually derive ſo great advantages from very corrupt religions, or from the imperfect regard to religion which even the generality of mankind have; what happineſs would not ariſe from the univerſal prevalence of that exalted piety which Chriſtianity

Chriſtianity requires? Were this true, unadulterated religion, heartily embraced, perfectly complied with, uniformly acted upon, it would render ſociety happier than we can eaſily imagine. Suppoſe the hearts of men poſſeſſed by thoſe pious regards which are due to infinite perfection; ſuppoſe theſe regards animated by a lively ſenſe of the manifold diſplays of infinite perfection in the ſyſtem of nature; ſuppoſe them refined and elevated by a vigorous and habitual conception of our Saviour's ſtupendous and gracious undertaking for the ſalvation of mankind; ſuppoſe them raiſed to all that ſtrength and firmneſs to which they may be raiſed by the influences of the ſpirit of grace, earneſtly implored and carefully improved; ſuppoſe them continually cheriſhed by the exerciſe of ſincere devotion; ſuppoſe them to rule within, and to produce that character which they naturally tend to produce; would not the temper which they form, imply ingenuous reverence and fear of *the Moſt High*, more effectual to govern the conduct, than the ſlaviſh dread of any earthly ruler? Would not this temper imply nobler ambition than any that can ariſe from political diſtinctions, ambition to pleaſe and to reſemble God? Would not this temper lead to purer and more ſolid virtue, than can reſult from or be ſupported by the beſt-conſtituted form of government? How powerful would civil laws become, were their influence ſtrengthened in every heart, by a ſteady regard to the laws, and to the judgement of the ruler of the world? Would not

civil laws, indeed, be almoſt unneceſſary? A temper of true Chriſtian piety would reſtrain men effectually from every degree of all thoſe crimes which diſturb the peace, or obſtruct the proſperity of a nation. If it were univerſally diffuſed, only neceſſary laws would be enacted, and every law would be chearfully and conſtantly obeyed. Every individual would be ſolicitous to act his part in ſociety in the beſt manner; the wiſdom of all would be united in contriving, and the endeavours of all would be combined in executing every meaſure of public utility; all thoſe virtues which contribute moſt to the happineſs of ſociety, cheriſhed by piety, would flouriſh in abſolute maturity. Accuſtomed as we are to the preſent degeneracy of the human race, it is not eaſy to ſtretch our imaginations ſo far, as to form an idea of the proſperity of a nation, in which "the people "were all righteous *," in which virtue directed and added force to the united power of the whole community; which, ſecure from every internal evil, were regarded with awe and reverence by nations more corrupted, and conſequently weaker. But were Chriſtian piety univerſally practiſed in any nation, that nation would experience in its infallible conſequences, this high proſperity, which is, at preſent, even inconceivable: and the favour of God, who "loveth righteouſneſs, and hateth iniquity †," would beſtow higher proſperity on that nation, than all which could reſult from the natural conſequences of their own piety.

* Iſ. lx. 21. † Pſal. xi. 7, v. 5.

I HOPE it is evident from what has been said, that piety contributes greatly to the public happiness of every nation. Let us *next* shew briefly, what influence the consideration of this ought to have on all ranks of men.

In every nation there are many of superior and distinguished rank. The higher the rank which persons hold, the greater will be the importance, the more extensive the influence of their behaviour in society. Any neglect of duty in them is more pernicious to their country, than a similar neglect in persons of inferior rank. Since religion, therefore, most effectually regulates the conduct of every citizen, how necessary is it to the happiness of a nation, that the great be entirely subject to the influence of religion? Your country calls upon you, ye great, ye noble, for her sake; she beseeches you, for the happiness which *your* right behaviour especially will confer on her, to excel in piety, that it may, like a living spirit, animate you continually in "seeking her good *." —Your piety will tend to make others, as well as yourselves, good citizens. They who have been least disposed to regard religion themselves, have nevertheless acknowledged the necessity of cherishing religious impressions in the generality. The example of the higher ranks will cherish them most successfully. Should their practice shew that they regard religion with indifference, mankind, always eager to imitate their superiors, will soon endeavour to

* Psal. cxii. 9.

free

free themſelves from the reſtraints which religion lays upon their vices. Piety conſiſts chiefly in an inward temper. It is a falſe appearance of it that ſtudiouſly diſplays itſelf in external ſhow. But inward piety is naturally expreſſed in unaffected devotion, and regular worſhip of God. It is only by being thus expreſſed, that it becomes obvious to others, or can attract their imitation. If we would render others pious by our good example, we muſt put forth piety into act on every proper occaſion. But the example of piety will be moſt attractive, when it is exhibited by thoſe whom Divine Providence has placed in an eminent rank. In their conduct piety will ſhine with the greateſt luſtre. When they render their regard to God conſpicuous and unqueſtionable, the reſt of mankind will be inſenſibly allured to the practice of religion. It is the privilege of thoſe who are exalted above the many, that they have it in their power to recommend every virtue to mankind, by their example; a noble privilege, which they are ſtrictly obliged to exerciſe. And can the obligation be ſtronger with regard to any virtue, than with regard to piety, which is moſt excellent in itſelf, and moſt beneficial to human ſociety?

Again, Becauſe piety has the ſtrongeſt tendency to promote the happineſs of every people, it is particularly incumbent on all who are intruſted with any degree of authority and power, on all governors, judges, and magiſtrates, to exerciſe and to encourage unfeigned and exalted

alted piety. Many of the rulers of every kingdom are naturally of ſuperior rank, and all of them derive importance from their public character. This will give force and influence to their example.——Rulers are the proper guardians of the peace and order of ſociety. It is chiefly religion that ſupports thoſe connections of individuals, which beſtow order on ſociety, which diſtinguiſh a regular polity from a confuſed multitude, and which produce public peace, proſperity, and power. On this account, all rulers are, by their office, in a peculiar manner, the guardians of religion. They cannot exert themſelves in this character, if they be either indifferent about religion, or averſe from it. Without a warm regard to religion prevailing in their own hearts, they will not employ their authority in promoting it. If, therefore, any ruler neglect the duties, or tranſgreſs the laws of piety, he unworthily betrays the higheſt intereſts of ſociety, with the protection of which he is intruſted. His practice tends, indirectly perhaps, but certainly, to multiply thoſe crimes which it is his buſineſs to correct; it tends to introduce thoſe diſorders into ſociety which his office is inſtituted on purpoſe to prevent.——— It is of the higheſt moment to ſociety, that the public functions of rulers be well executed. Rulers are leſs ſubject than others to the reſtraints which ariſe from human laws. They can execute the laws againſt others; but themſelves have many advantages for eluding the force of the laws, from

from their rank, their authority, and power. The laws of religion alone, regarded and complied with, can ſufficiently control their actions. In thoſe monſtrous governments themſelves where the power of rulers is abſolute, the laws even of falſe and corrupt religions lay ſome reſtraint on the will of the rulers, and induce them to act, in many inſtances, with moderation. What happineſs, then, might not be derived to mankind from their governors, if, in better conſtitutions of government, a purer religion united its reſtraints with thoſe under which the civil laws lay the higheſt rulers?—— Power is apt to be abuſed, and to produce inſolence and ſeverity. The benign ſpirit of Chriſtian piety, thoroughly imbibed by rulers, is the moſt effectual preſervative from the abuſe of power. Religion will beget in the mighty ones of the earth a ſenſe of dependence on *the Moſt High*, whoſe children and ſubjects all men are; and this ſenſe will be a powerful principle of juſtice, gentleneſs, and clemency to all whom God hath ſubjected to their power. Religion will lead them to conſider their power as derived from the gracious and righteous governor of the world; and to exerciſe it uniformly for the good of all, according to the example of righteouſneſs and benignity which God exhibits in his providence towards his creatures. The univerſal prevalence of Chriſtian piety would have force enough to baniſh from the earth the cruel ſlavery under which a great part of mankind groan at preſent. In fact, where-ever Chriſtianity

ſtianity has been embraced, it has prevented many of the horrors of lawleſs deſpotiſm, and introduced ſome degree of moderation into the ſpirit of government. Governors, animated by its genuine power, will ever be "the miniſters "of God to men for good *." "Be wiſe now "therefore, O ye kings: be inſtructed, ye judges of the earth: ſerve the Lord with fear †." "Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto "the Lord glory and ſtrength. Give unto the "Lord the glory due unto his name; worſhip "the Lord in the beauty of holineſs ‡."

Further, the conſideration of that influence which piety has upon the public happineſs, ought to add ſtrength to the endeavours of all the miniſters of Jeſus, for cheriſhing the benign and heavenly ſpirit of religion in the hearts of men. We are bound by the ſtrongeſt ties, my Reverend Fathers and Brethren, we are urged by all poſſible conſiderations, to promote univerſal and ſincere regard to God, whoſe miniſters, for this very end, we are. Should our country find any of *us* defective in piety, that virtue which is rendered peculiarly incumbent upon us by the relation in which we ſtand to the all-perfect object of it; ſhould our country have reaſon to impute any of the miſchiefs which ſhe cannot fail to ſuffer from the impiety of her ſons, to our indifference about religion; O let us think, what indignation may ſhe not juſtly pour out on us, as the moſt un-

* Rom. xiii. 4. † Pſal. ii. 10. 11.
‡ Pſal. xxix. 1. 2.

dutiful

dutiful and abandoned of her children; as wretches, who cannot be reſtrained by conſiderations, moſt ſacred to all, but to us more ſacred than to any others, from being traitors to her moſt important intereſts! True piety is to every nation, like the ſun to this earth; it alone can enlighten, warm, cheriſh, or invigorate all its inhabitants. But in the preſent age, the influences of this glorious luminary are often obſtructed, often infected. The impious, as if they dwelt in ſome frozen clime, feel none of its force; the dark clouds of ſuperſtition intercept its rays from others; enthuſiaſm, like a flaſhing meteor, confounds its light, and converts its genial warmth into unnatural, ſultry, and ſuffocating heat. To the miniſters of region is committed the important office of conducting all, as it were, into a happy region, and placing them in a favourable ſituation, where the beams of religion, unobſtructed, pure, and intenſe, may penetrate their hearts. Would we promote the happineſs of men, either in this world or in the next, let us do our utmoſt to lay their ſouls open to the influences of piety, and to prepare them for receiving them. Be it our conſtant care to preſent to the view of our hearers true piety, and ſerious devotion, in its genuine form, neither tainted by enthuſiaſm, nor debaſed by ſuperſtition; let us labour to expreſs the ſecret operation of devout affections in the heart; let us diſplay their beauty and their power, in all the exerciſes of fervent devotion; let us dwell often

ten on the view of divine excellence, eſpecially as it is manifeſted in the Chriſtian diſpenſation, that men may feel what regards are due to it, that they may perceive the baſe degeneracy of that ſoul which cannot be affected by it; let us endeavour to excite their love to godlineſs, by repreſenting, as far as words can repreſent, the charms of a temper of devotion, its refined and exquiſite pleaſures, and its happy conſequences; let us uſe all the means we can, to form men to the taſte, and to win them to the purſuit of that real dignity of character, which piety alone can beſtow; let piety eſpecially ſhine forth pure, fervent, and exalted, in our own example. By aiming continually at all this, we ſhall beſt perform our duty, not only to God, and to our own ſouls, but alſo to our country. If our endeavours prove ſucceſsful, by our means "peace ſhall be within her walls, and "proſperity within her palaces *:" for the favour of God ſhall reſt upon her; her children ſhall call us bleſſed among men; and we ſhall "ſee her good;" we ſhall "rejoice in the gladneſs of our nation, and glory with the Lord's "inheritance †."

Finally, let us all, whatever be our rank or ſtation, *fear the Lord always, for our good.* The enemies of religion impudently boaſt, that their enlarged views have enabled them to provide for the *preſent* happineſs of the world, by ſetting men free from the uneaſy apprehenſions of a God and a future ſtate. But it may

* Pſal. cxxii. 7. † Pſal. cvi. 5.

be affirmed with greater truth, that by checking all regard to that great being who alone can beſtow *eternal* happineſs, they, at the ſame time, with ſurpriſing narrowneſs of thought, deſtroy the only foundation of *preſent* peace and happineſs, both to individuals and to ſocieties. Let us, my Chriſtian brethren, ever regard their attempts with indignation. In ſpight of all the ſophiſtry, and all the ridicule, by which they would deſtroy a firm faith, and lively ſenſe of God; by which they would diſcourage the fervent exerciſe of devout affections; by which they would overturn our belief of the goſpel of Chriſt, the firmeſt ſupport, the higheſt improvement of genuine piety; let us be perſuaded, that "to fear the Lord will "always be our righteouſneſs *." We are all members of ſociety; we are all obliged to promote its peace and happineſs; an argument drawn from its intereſt ought to be irreſiſtible to us all; let us, therefore, practiſe piety, which is the principal bond of ſocial union. We are obliged to piety, not only as we are men and Chriſtians, but alſo as we are citizens; it is a duty which each of us owes to his country. If we be truly pious, we ſhall, at leaſt, render *ourſelves* fitter for acting our part well: we ſhall likewiſe contribute to render *others* more uſeful ſubjects. None of us is ſo obſcure, as to be wholly incapable of promoting religion by an example of regard to it. Princes may recommend religion powerfully by their autho-

* Deut. vi. 25.

rity

rity and example; our pious king is ſolicitous to recommend it. They who have laboured in forming his young heart to piety, have influence enough to give extenſive encouragement to this divine virtue; we truſt they will give it. But the meaneſt of us may aſſiſt their noble efforts; the meaneſt of us may be religious; the meaneſt of us may ſhow an attractive, living form of piety. We cannot all ſerve our country, by contriving or executing great deſigns; but we may all ſerve it effectually by being pious. If we be actuated uniformly by piety, our low ſtation may prevent our being celebrated as patriots in the annals of men, but we ſhall be inrolled patriots in the records of Heaven; for we ſhall perform the moſt important duty to our country which any man can perform. "Bleſſed is the nation whoſe "God is the Lord *." He will always be the God of a religious and virtuous nation. "Let "all the earth, therefore, fear the Lord; let "all the inhabitants of the world ſtand in awe "of him †."

* Pſal. xxxiii. 12. † Verſe 8.

SERMON XVI.

Zeal for the Civil and Religious Intereſts of Mankind recommended.

By ALEXANDER WEBSTER, D. D.

Preached at the opening of the General Aſſembly of the Church of Scotland, May 23. 1754.

PSALM cxxxvii. 5. 6.

If I forget thee, O Jeruſalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.

If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jeruſalem above my chief joy.

THIS pſalm, whoever was the writer of it, appears to have been compoſed in the latter days of the Jewiſh church, during the Babyloniſh captivity, or immediately after it. For in the firſt and ſecond verſes we find the people of God mingling their tears with the waters, and hanging their harps upon the willows of Babylon, when they remembered the former glory, and conſidered the preſent deſolations of Zion. The third verſe repreſents the inhuman and barbarous treatment they met with from their enemies, who, inſtead of pitying, triumphed over their miſery, by calling for mirth and a ſong; to which theſe brave captives

tives resolutely answered, in the fourth verse, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange "land?" Shall we prostitute these songs, sacred to the honour of Zion's God, to mere sport and pastime? shall we sing these divine anthems, peculiar to the temple-service, when banished from the temple, and exiles in this land of idolaters? No, says the Psalmist in the words of our text, *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy*, or, the head of my joy: *q. d.* If, unmindful of thy desolations and thy ruin, I should gratify the desires of thine enemies, by profaning thy music and thy songs, let my right hand lose all its skill of touching the harp any more; if I do not remember thee with the most hearty sympathy and concern, and prefer thy welfare and prosperity to every worldly joy, let my lips be for ever closed, and my tongue be for ever silent.

As Jerusalem was the capital city of Judea, and the seat of empire, where were "set thrones "of judgement, and the thrones of the house "of David *," it may here fitly represent the whole nation of the Jews; and as it was the holy city, "whither the tribes of the Lord "went up unto the testimony of Israel, to give "thanks to the name of the Lord †," it was also a proper type of the visible church: in

* Psal. cxxii. 5. † Psal. cxxii. 4.

which view, the words of our text are the language of a heart full of zeal for the welfare of its native country, and the church of God; and, in a ſtriking and elegant manner, ſet before us a lively example of a truly public ſpirit.

In diſcourſing upon this ſubject, I do not propoſe to confine myſelf to that love which every one ought to feel for his native country, as diſtinguiſhed from the reſt of the world, or for that particular church of which he is a member; but to conſider the argument in the moſt extended light, by ſhewing what weighty obligations we are under to be zealous for the civil and religious intereſts of mankind in general; whence it will follow, by ſtrong and neceſſary conſequence, with what warmth of affection we ought to ſeek the good of thoſe with whom we are more nearly connected, as ſubjects of the ſame kingdom, and members of the ſame church. And, through divine aſſiſtance, I would argue,

1. From the law of our creation, and the law of grace, as illuſtrated by the precepts and examples which we find in ſacred writ; and,

2. From the nature of univerſal benevolence itſelf; as conſtituting the moſt amiable and worthy character; as converſant about objects of the greateſt moment and importance; and as inſeparably connected with our own true and beſt intereſts.

I. Let us then conſider, in the firſt place, the obligations we are under to promote the public

public welfare from the law of our creation, and the law of grace, as illuſtrated by the precepts and examples in ſacred writ.

"Have we not all one father, (ſay the inſpi-"red writers), and hath not one God created "us, who hath made of one blood all nations "of men, and is King over all the earth *?" And it is the voice of nature itſelf, that mankind are in reality brethren, the children of the ſame common parent, the offspring of the Father of the ſpirits of all fleſh, and the ſubjects of his univerſal empire: ſo that both reaſon and revelation lead us to view the moſt diſtant regions of the earth as containing only different branches of the ſame family, or as diſtricts of the ſame kingdom, under the ſame divine government; and to conſider ourſelves as citizens of the world, parts of that great WHOLE, to whom therefore nothing that relates to the good or prejudice of the whole ought to be indifferent †.

And if we reflect on the various powers and faculties, the diſpoſitions and affections, with which we are endued by the wiſe and benevolent Author of our beings, it will plainly appear, that we were not made for ourſelves only, but for others alſo; and conſequently that we ought to ſeek the good of others, according to our ſeveral abilities, and the opportunities afforded us.

* Mal. ii. 10. Acts xvii. 26. Pſal. xlvii. 7.

† Homo ſum, humani nihil a me alienum puto.

Nor

Nor can it be denied, that ſuch are the dependent neceſſitous circumſtances of man, that he cannot live by himſelf with any degree of comfort or ſafety: and if a man cannot live by himſelf, neither ought he to live to himſelf. We, of all other beings, when ſeparated from one another, are the moſt joyleſs and helpleſs: and though God hath implanted in parents and children ſuch affections as incline them to aſſiſt and relieve each other, yet the wants and dangers of human life are ſo many and great, that no particular family, however numerous, is ſufficient of itſelf for all the purpoſes of well-being and comfort. We need the aſſiſtance of others; we need the public favour and protection; and therefore are bound, in our turn, to be uſeful to the public, who have a natural right to our good offices, and whoſe claim to them is interwoven with our frame.

What hath been ſaid from the law of our creation, is ſtrongly inforced upon us Chriſtians by the law of grace, which unites us into one myſtical body, whereof Chriſt is the head; and which conſiders all believers as members of the ſame undivided catholic church, whereof Jeſus is the Lord and King. In this reſpect the whole people of God are called the children of Zion, and Jeruſalem the mother of them all. Hence Paul, having repreſented to the Corinthians the ſtrict union betwixt the members of the natural body, whence reſults ſuch mutual ſympathy and concern, that there is no ſchiſm in the body, but the members have the ſame

care

care one for another, concludes, "Now are ye "the body of Chriſt, and members in parti-"cular *."

Now, if the ties of nature are ſo ſtrong and powerful, how much more thoſe of grace? if, as men and brethren according to the fleſh, we are bound to help one another, need I ſay this is incumbent upon us as brethren in Chriſt, linked together in the ſureſt bonds of love and friendſhip, within the ſame everlaſting covenant, and animated by the ſame ſpirit?

The argument, in this view, will appear more convincing, when we conſider the precepts and examples of ſacred writ. The genius of our holy religion breathes every where a diſintereſted regard for the glory of God and the happineſs of mankind; that charity and benevolence, which ſeeketh not her own, but the good of others, appears almoſt in every page of the New Teſtament; ſo that it is not eaſy to conceive what could tempt a celebrated writer to object to Chriſtianity, that it no where recommends private friendſhip, or the love of our country. This was doubtleſs included in the royal law, under the Old Teſtament, of "loving our neighbour as ourſelves †." And it is the language of the New: "Look not e-"very man on his own things, but every man "alſo on the things of others ‡." Paul exhorts the Galatians to "do good unto all men, eſpe-"cially unto them who are of the houſhold

* 1 Cor. xii. 27. † Lev. xix. 18. ‡ Philip. ii. 4.

" of faith *." " To add to godlineſs, brother-" ly kindneſs; and to brotherly kindneſs, " charity †," is the doctrine, not only of Peter, but of the reſt of the apoſtles: which precept is carried to the higheſt perfection by our Saviour himſelf, who commands us, " to love " one another, as he hath loved us ‡;" nay, to extend our regards to all our brethren of mankind, the moſt unworthy not excepted, in imitation of our heavenly Father, " who ſend-" eth rain on the juſt and the unjuſt, and is " kind to the evil and unthankful ‖."

Nor is this divine virtue more conſpicuous in the precepts, than in the lives of Chriſt and his apoſtles, and other holy men of old. Need we go to Rome or Greece for inſtances of thoſe who preferred the public intereſt to their own private advantage? No, my brethren; the Bibles which we hold in our hands, furniſh far more ſhining and illuſtrious examples. Animated by this noble principle, Moſes, the great lawgiver of the Jews, was willing to die for his people, though the moſt ungrateful rebellious race **: Eli trembled more for the ark of God, than for the deſtruction of his family ††; and the Royal Pſalmiſt could ſay unto God himſelf, " The zeal of thine houſe hath eaten " me up ‡‡." In what moving ſtrains do we find Eliſha, Jeremiah, and the other prophets, mourning over the deſolations of Zion, long-

* Gal. vi. 10. † 2 Pet. i. 7. ‡ John, xv. 12.
‖ Matth. v. 45. Luke, vi. 35. ** Exod. xxxii. 32.
†† 1 Sam. iv. 13. 18. ‡‡ Pſal. lxix. 9.

ing,

ing, and faſting, and praying, that the "ſet time "to favour her might come, taking pleaſure in "her very ſtones, and favouring the duſt "thereof *?" How ſtedfaſtly did Daniel adhere to the intereſts of true religion and liberty, when thrown into a den of lions †; and the three children, when caſt into Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, ſeven times heated ‡? But time would fail me to tell of Iſaiah, and of Nehemiah, and Ezra alſo, and of Samuel, and other ſaints; whoſe zealous appearances for God, in times of public danger and diſtreſs, are celebrated in ſcripture to their immortal honour.

And what ſhall I ſay of the apoſtles, and firſt followers of the Lamb, who loved not their lives unto the death, that they might fulfil the miniſtry, and the work, which they had received of the Lord Jeſus? Language cannot expreſs that fervent zeal, and brotherly affection, which Paul felt when he ſpoke theſe ſurpriſing words, "I could wiſh that myſelf were "accurſed from Chriſt, for my brethren, my "kinſmen according to the fleſh ‖:" and, leſt we ſhould imagine his concern extended no further than to his own countrymen, the Jews, he would have us know, as he tells the Coloſſians, "what great conflict he had, not only "for the ſaints and faithful brethren which "were at Coloſſe, but for them of Laodicea, "and for as many as had not ſeen his face in "the fleſh **."

* Pſal. cii. 13. 14. † Dan. vi. 19.——16.
‡ Dan. iii. 18.——23. ‖ Rom. ix. 3. ** Col. ii. 1.

In

In like manner, the other apoſtles, inſtead of confining their labours within the narrow ſphere of their particular friends and countrymen, went from place to place, from city to city, caſting out devils, and preaching the goſpel of the kingdom, forcing their way through numberleſs hazards and dangers; and having finiſhed their painful courſe, ſealed their teſtimony with their blood.

Theſe indeed are ſhining examples of a truly public ſpirit: and yet one ſtill remains far more perfect and glorious; the example of our bleſſed Saviour himſelf, who came from heaven to earth, to live and die for a ſinful, rebellious world. The illuſtrious tribe of patriots, martyrs, and confeſſors, have done much and well; but Jeſus has done infinitely more and better. What Paul ſays of himſelf is applicable to his Lord and Maſter in a far higher ſenſe: "In "labours more abundant, in wearineſs and "painfulneſs, in watchings often, in hunger "and thirſt, in faſtings often, in cold and na"kedneſs; and beſides thoſe things that are "without, that which came upon him daily, "the care of all the churches. Who was "weak, and he was not weak? who was offend"ed, and he did not burn *?" With what ardent zeal, and indefatigable labour, did he ſeek to gather Jeruſalem, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings! and when ſhe would not hearken to his compaſſionate in-

* 2 Cor. xi. 23. 27. 28. 29.

treaties, how moving his lamentation over her: "O Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem, if thou hadſt known, "even thou at leaſt in this thy day, the things "which belong unto thy peace! but now they "are hid from thine eyes *."

His amiable character is elegantly ſummed up, by the apoſtle Peter, in theſe comprehenſive words, "who went about doing good †." Not ſatisfied with bleſſing his relations and diſciples, or thoſe who came to him, his enlarged heart ſought every opportunity of extending its affectionate regards to the whole human race; doing good both to Jews and Gentiles, to the ſouls as well as to the bodies of men; reſtoring them at once to the divine favour and to the divine image; and having erected the kingdom of God among men, on the ruins of ſuperſtition and idolatry, he died a glorious victim for the honour of God and the ſalvation of his people, greatly pouring out his ſoul upon the croſs, "as the propitiation for the ſins, not "of the Jews only, but of the whole world ‡."

And thus you ſee how the united voice of nature and of grace, the law and the prophets, Chriſt and his apoſtles, call upon us as children of the great Parent of mankind, and members of the body of Chriſt, to prefer the public welfare above our chief joy.

II. We proceed therefore, as was propoſed, in the ſecond place, To recommend ſuch a ge-

* Luke, xiii. 34. xix. 42. † Acts, x. 38.
‡ 1 John, ii. 2.

nerous public ſpirit from its own nature and excellency; as conſtituting the moſt amiable and worthy character; as converſant about objects of the greateſt moment and importance; and as inſeparably connected with our own true and beſt intereſts.

"Whatſoever things are true, whatſoever "things are honeſt, whatſoever things are juſt, "whatſoever things are pure, whatſoever "things are lovely, whatſoever things are of "good report, if there be any virtue, and if "there be any praiſe *;" theſe are all comprehended in that general good-will, and public affection, of which we now ſpeak. If we eſteem the affectionate parent, or the dutiful child, the loving brother, or the faithful friend; what eſteem is due to the friend of mankind, and the lover of ſouls!

In the exerciſe of the more private virtues, we ſee only parts of a character, and many things are ſtill wanting; but in the exerciſe of univerſal beneficence, we ſee all the ſocial virtues happily united; we ſee a character carried to its higheſt perfection; a man reſembling God himſelf, by diffuſing bleſſings and happineſs around him.

Repreſent to yourſelves ſuch a worthy patriot in the ſenate, greatly pleading, in face of approaching danger, the cauſe of an injured nation or church: follow him to the camp, in his garments rolled in blood, where, unmoved amidſt all the horrors of war and inſtru-

* Philip. iv. 8.

ments

ments of death, he fights for his people and the cities of his God; and ſee him at laſt falling a ſacrifice in the noble conteſt; or ſee him, if brought to a ſcaffold, not accepting deliverance, but calmly reſigning life itſelf as a glorious martyr for his God and his country: and you behold a ſight lovely in the eyes of God, and of all good men; human nature in its greateſt glory and perfection; a character ſhining with ſuch unfading luſtre, as muſt neceſſarily command reſpect from enemies themſelves.

Whereas, on the contrary, there can be nothing more hateful and mean, than a mercenary ſpirit; a man wrapt up wholly in himſelf, forgetting the very end and deſign of his being; forgetting that ſubordination which God hath eſtabliſhed in his world; breaking through every tie of duty and gratitude, love and benevolence; and all this, to anſwer no higher purpoſe than the gratification of his own irregular and ſelfiſh appetites. Such a man, though decked with the ornaments and ſpoils of his fellow-creatures, is in reality more odious, and a greater blemiſh in the moral, than the moſt ugly and deformed creature can be in the natural world.

It was likewiſe obſerved, that we are bound to prefer the public good to private advantage; not only as ſuch a temper and conduct conſtitutes the moſt amiable and exalted character, but as it is converſant about objects of the greateſt moment and importance.

Great was the object of the Pſalmiſt's zeal in the text, the whole nation and church of the Jews; but greater, ſtill, is the object of that enlarged affection we are now recommending. We ſpeak of the higheſt of all ſocial duties, regard to the religious, as well as to the civil intereſts of men; all their concerns, in reference to ſoul and body, time and eternity; reſpecting not a few, a family, a city, a particular nation or church, but all our fellow-men, and all our fellow-Chriſtians. And can we conceive any purſuit more worthy of the rational nature, or more becoming the heaven-born ſoul? a purſuit which ſtretches its happy influence beyond the limits of mortality, into the eternal world, and follows the redeemed of the Lord through all the growing ages of that everlaſting ſtate!

Glorious things were ſpoken of Jeruſalem of old, which may with great reaſon be applied to the goſpel-church; "the mount Zion to "which we are now come, the palace of the "eternal King, the perfection of beauty, and "the joy of the whole earth; the new Jeruſa-"lem, the general aſſembly, and church of the "firſt-born *." A glorious church indeed, the city of the living God, founded by his wiſdom, preſerved by his power, animated by his ſpirit, and governed by his laws, nay, purchaſed with his blood. Who would not ſeek her good always, as the beſt and the nobleſt means of advancing the honour of God, and the happineſs

* Heb. xii. 22. 23.

pineſs of his creatures? To which may be added what was obſerved,

In the laſt place, That ſuch a generous concern for the public welfare, is inſeparably connected with our own true and beſt intereſts.

What is the public, the ALL, but the individuals taken together, who muſt therefore ſhare in one common undivided fate? It is here, in the body-politic, as in the body-natural, where the whole members are mutually happy or miſerable. A little reflection with reſpect to our temporal affairs, may convince us, that private happineſs is not to be enjoyed on any ſure and laſting foundation, but in ſubordination to the public good. Was every one to ſeek his own peace and quiet, without regard to that of his neighbour; was every one to purſue his particular deſigns in oppoſition to the general intereſt; how miſerably ſhould every one find himſelf miſtaken? The conteſt would run higher and higher, till, as one obſerves in another caſe, it terminated in a war of all men againſt ALL, the plain conſequence of which would be the deſtruction of ALL.

A man may indeed advance his own private intereſt for a while, in oppoſition to the good of the ſociety of which he is a member; but ſurely "he ſtands on ſlippery places, and may "be brought into deſolation as in a moment *." While he is ſuſpecting no harm, ſome unforeſeen event cuts off his future hopes, and brings him down from all the heights of his imaginary

* Pſal. lxxiii. 18. 19.

happineſs; agreeable to the Pſalmiſts obſervation, "I have ſeen the wicked in great power, "and ſpreading himſelf like a green bay-tree. "Yet he paſſed away, and lo he was not: yea, "I ſought him, but he could not be found *." He cannot always deceive the injured; they begin at length to feel their ſufferings, and ſeldom fail to make ſufficient repriſals. But, ſhould he eſcape puniſhment from man, there is a God above him, who ſooner or later will bring him into judgement. Death opens a paſſage to that awful ſtate, where, from him "who hath made ſuch a bad uſe of his talents, "ſhall be taken even that which he hath;" and the irreverſible ſentence ſhall go forth, "Caſt ye the wicked ſervant into utter dark-"neſs: there ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of "teeth †."

On the contrary, the diſintereſted friend of mankind, who makes every one's concern his own, and chearfully gives up perſonal eaſe and advantage when it comes in competition with the general good; how bleſſed is that man in the exerciſe of thoſe noble and generous affections, which yield the moſt refined delight, and moſt exalted pleaſure! how happy in the teſtimony of his own conſcience, which to him is a continual feaſt, and the matter of his rejoicing! and how infinitely more happy in the approbation of one greater than his conſcience, the ſupreme Lord and Judge of the whole earth!

* Pſal. xxxvii. 35. 36. † Matth. xxv. 24.—30.

Such

Such a man, the friend of all, is beloved and eſteemed by all: he paſſes through the various ſcenes of life with ſafety and reſpect; if in offices of truſt, he holds them by the ſureſt tenure, the good-will of his fellow-ſubjects: and when, as to this world, he is no more, his name ſhall be had in everlaſting remembrance: and my audience will bear me witneſs, that our own nation hath, of late, afforded ſome very ſtriking examples of this amiable character.

But, if his lot is caſt in the worſt of times, when he muſt not only quit with the comforts of life, but loſe even life itſelf for the ſake of his God and his country; he ſhall find it in that other and better world, where God commands the bleſſing, even life for evermore *.

Having, on a former occaſion †, illuſtrated this branch of the argument at greater length; I ſhall not at preſent inſiſt farther on the inſeparable connection between public and private happineſs, with reſpect to our temporal affairs: and I need ſcarce ſay, how much our ſpiritual intereſts depend on the proſperity of Zion, the church of God, as being her myſtical children, and members of the ſame body, who muſt neceſſarily ſuffer or rejoice with one another.

"That the haters of Zion ſhall be confound-
"ed and turned back; and ſhall be as graſs
"upon the houſe-tops, which withereth afore
"it groweth up; while they ſhall proſper that

* Matth. x. 39.

† Sermon preached before the Magiſtrates on Philip. ii. 4.

"love

"love her *," is expreſsly declared in holy writ, and ſtands confirmed by the teſtimony of all ages. And it muſt be ſo; for if God loves the gates of Zion, he will love them that love her; and they whom God loves, muſt be happy.

While they who are lukewarm and indifferent in the cauſe of Chriſt, are repreſented by the ſacred writers as objects of the divine diſpleaſure †; they who are zealouſly affected towards his intereſt, are conſidered as the ſpecial objects of the divine care and protection ‡; his peculiar treaſure, in whom his ſoul delighteth; the excellent ones of the earth, "who ſhall ſee the good of his choſen, rejoice "in the gladneſs of his nation, and glory with "his inheritance ‖." And what ſhall I ſay of that happineſs and felicity, which awaits ſuch faithful ſervants, when welcomed to the joy of their Lord? If in that day, not ſo much as a cup of cold water given to one in the name of a diſciple, ſhall loſe its reward; how inconceivably great, how glorious muſt his reward be, who, from a principle of love to God and men, hath lived and died in the ſervice of God and men! For him, indeed, is ſown a joyful light in the Zion that is above. And there he "ſhall ſhine as the brightneſs "of the firmament, and as the ſtars for ever "and ever **."

* Pſal. cxxix. 5. 6. cxxii. 6. † Zech. xii. 3. Rev. iii. 16.
‡ Ezek. ix. 4. Rev. vii. 3. 9. 14.
‖ Pſal. cvi. 5. xcvii. 12. ** Dan. xii. 3.

Theſe

Theſe are only a few hints of what might have been repreſented, in a variety of particulars, for illuſtrating the doctrinal part of our ſubject.

SER-

SERMON XVII.

The Subject continued.

By Alexander Webster, D. D.

Psalm cxxxvii. 5. 6.

If I forget thee, O Jeruſalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.

If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jeruſalem above my chief joy.

WE now proceed to the practical improvement of what hath been ſaid in the preceding diſcourſe.

The diſtreſſed circumſtances of the people and church of God, which gave riſe to the moving lamentation in the verſes preceding our text, ought to inſpire us with the moſt lively ſenſe of the happineſs we in this nation enjoy. The Jews were exiles from their native country, under the oppreſſion of a cruel arbitrary tyrant: we are the ſubjects of the beſt of kings, enjoying all the bleſſings of Britiſh liberty. They were baniſhed from the tabernacle, and the altar of God; to us the doors of his houſe and ſanctuary are continually open. They were captives in the land of an idolatrous prince, who prohibited their ſolemn aſſemblies, and courts of judicature; but we

are

are this day to meet in a judicative capacity, under the royal countenance and approbation; and have now before our eyes the moſt convincing proof, with how much propriety our gracious Sovereign may be ſtyled a nurſing father to this church.

What grateful returns might have been expected from a people ſo highly favoured! what proper improvement of ſuch invaluable privileges! But alas! my brethren, how have theſe things been perverted to the worſt of purpoſes! Hath not our civil liberty been abuſed by the moſt daring licentiouſneſs, and affronted by repeated rebellions? and hath not our religious liberty been turned into an occaſion of propagating atheiſm and infidelity?

The contempt of the glorious goſpel of Chriſt; the neglect of divine inſtitutions; the profanation of that day, ſacred to the honour of the Redeemer; the avowed impiety of thoſe who have caſt off all regard for God and religion; the more ſecret wickedneſs of ſuch as have at beſt but a form of godlineſs, while deſtitute of its power and life; the want, among too many of the profeſſed followers of Chriſt, of that ſympathy, that love, and mutual forbearance, which is the diſtinguiſhing badge of his diſciples; the angry debates and warm conteſts, the animoſities and diviſions, which rend and diſtract even the friends of Jeſus; and in conſequence of all this, the withdrawings of that divine Spirit, whoſe preſence is the beauty, the glory, and the all of a Chriſtian church,—

are mournful proofs, that however happy and proſperous we are in reſpect of our outward ſtate and condition, vital religion and practical godlineſs languiſh apace.

In ſaying this much, I have doubtleſs ſaid nothing that can be denied: and God is my witneſs, I mean not to indulge a cenſorious humour; but would wiſh to perſuade the friends of religion and liberty, how much theſe important intereſts call for their warmeſt zeal, and moſt vigorous endeavours; when, "by "the abounding of iniquity, the love of many "waxeth cold *, and all men, (as Paul ſays of "his times, meaning the far greater part) "ſeek their own, not the things which are "Chriſt's †."

Suffer then, my brethren, the word of exhortation; and ſeeing "the perilous days are "come, in which men are lovers of their own "ſelves ‡;" let us imitate the noble, the generous few, who, warmed with the love of God, and the love of their country, prefer Jeruſalem to their chiefeſt joy.

And here let it be obſerved, that whatever arguments, for promoting the welfare of mankind in general, ariſe from the laws of nature and of grace, from the practice and writings of the prophets and apoſtles, from the command and example of the great God our Saviour, and from our own beſt intereſts, they all ſtrongly plead for the preſervation

* Matth. xxiv. 12. † Philip. ii. 21.
‡ 2 Tim. iii. 1. 2.

and ſupport of our conſtitution in particular, both in church and ſtate, as the great means of our happineſs in this world, and in the world to come.

The excellency of our civil conſtitution will readily be admitted, as the juſt mean between abſolute monarchy, the parent of tyranny and oppreſſion, and a merely popular government, the ſource of anarchy and confuſion; a conſtitution, by which the prerogative of the crown, and the rights of the people, are mutually ſecured and duly regulated; a conſtitution, that does not allow the ſubject wantonly to rebel on every act of maleadminiſtration, nor oblige him tamely to ſubmit to the overthrow of its fundamental laws; a conſtitution, wiſely calculated to promote what is the true original, and what ought to be the end of all government, the ſafety and happineſs of the whole; and, I may add, a conſtitution, which provides the beſt ſecurity for our religious as well as civil liberty, and the ſtrongeſt bulwark againſt Popery, that myſtery of iniquity, and grand corrupter of Chriſtianity.

With reſpect to our eccleſiaſtical conſtitution, that part of the church of God which he hath planted, and which the laws of the land have eſtabliſhed, amongſt us, I may be allowed to ſay, eſpecially from the place where I have now the honour to ſtand, that it deſerves the higheſt regard, on many accounts, as a church of Chriſt, "built upon the foundation of the "apoſtles and prophets, Jeſus Chriſt himſelf

"being the chief corner-ſtone *;" as a Proteſtant church, reformed from the errors and tyranny, the ſuperſtition and will-worſhip, which ſully the glory, and threaten the ruin, of many Chriſtian temples; a church, whoſe rights and privileges have been handed down to us, at a vaſt expence of treaſure and of blood; a church that hath been long the peculiar care of Heaven, and particularly of late years, when God raiſed up a ſecond William, as a deliverer upon Mount Zion; and, in one word, which demands the particular attention of the laity, a church, my brethren, that gives her miniſters no dominion over your faith, or your conſcience, but calls them to be "the "helpers of your joy; not to lord it over "God's heritage, but to become enſamples to "the flock; and not to ſeek yours, but you; "warning every man, and teaching every man, "in all wiſdom, that they may preſent every "man perfect in Chriſt Jeſus †."

Such is the nature of the Britiſh conſtitution, and ſuch are the principles of the church of Scotland, which I am now recommending to your eſteem and regard; and had I been able to place the argument in its true and proper light, every heart, methinks, would have ſpoken the language of the text: *If I forget thee, O Jeruſalem, let my right hand forget her cunning: If I do not remember thee, let my tongue*

* Eph. ii. 20.

† 2 Cor. i. 24. 1 Pet. v. 3. 2 Cor. xii. 14. Col. i. 28. Confeſſ. of Faith, chap. 30. § 2.

cleave

cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jeruſalem above my chief joy.

But whatever has been wanting in argument, will, I perſuade myſelf, be more than ſupplied by your own obſervation: it therefore only remains, that I beſeech and obteſt all within theſe walls, as they regard the honour of God, the glory of the Redeemer, the happineſs of their fellow-creatures, and their own well-being, to exert their utmoſt endeavours for the ſupport of our civil and religious intereſts. Embarked in one bottom, ſubjects of the ſame kingdom, and members of the ſame church, expoſed to common dangers, and ſharing in common privileges; thus united, let the good of all be the firſt and chief care of all.

The laudable zeal of the legiſlature for civilizing the highlands and iſlands; the continuance of the Royal Bounty for diffuſing the knowledge of Chriſtianity through thoſe remote corners of our country where ignorance and vice have long had their ſeat; and his Majeſty's uncommon attention, ſince laſt rebellion, to theſe parts of his united kingdom, which has been followed with ſo great ſucceſs, in reforming many old abuſes *, ought to inſpire us

* The diſaffected have been diſarmed, and their dreſs changed; the heritable juriſdictions and ward-holdings, which tended to oppreſs the people, are aboliſhed; certain forfeited eſtates have been annexed to the crown, for increaſing the number of pariſhes, and encouraging labour and manufacture; forts are built, and roads made through the moſt inacceſſible places of the north; which will, in

us with a noble desire of imitating his paternal care.

Those of my audience whom God in his providence has raised to superior stations in life, will permit me to rejoice in the many happy opportunities afforded them of promoting the public good: first, by their access to the throne itself, and their influence with those at the helm of affairs, who can build up what is cast down, strengthen what is weak, and confirm the more excellent parts of our constitution: next, by their own example; in paying a sacred regard to the interests of religion and virtue, of which the many blessed effects would soon be universally felt: and lastly, "by being "rich in good works, ready to distribute, wil-"ling to communicate of the abundance "which God hath given them *." But of this the most passing hint is sufficient, while I speak to those "who have clothed the naked, fed "the hungry, visited the sick and the father-"less, and made the widow's heart to sing for "joy †." Thrice happy they who have thus made to themselves friends of the riches of

time, open a way to traffic and correspondence with the more southern and civilized parts of the country; and of consequence will, at length, become the happy mean of polishing the manners of the inhabitants, of rescuing them from their present slavish dependence on their chiefs, of banishing their high and destructive notions of clanship, and of changing their language, the strong hold of ignorance and rebellion.

* 1 Tim. vi. 17—19. † Job, xxix. 13.

of

of this world. Our Saviour himſelf has told them, "That when its fails, they ſhall be re-"ceived into everlaſting habitations *."

The magiſtrates and rulers of this city, need not be informed, that as God's vicegerents on earth, and veſted with power and authority for the ſafety and advantage of the community, they are bound to rule for God, and the good of the community; "being a terror to evil-"doers, and a praiſe to them that do well †;" imitating the excellent Mordecai, "who ſought "the wealth of his people, and ſpoke peace to "all his ſeed ‡."

But I muſt not forget, my Reverend Fathers and Brethren, to ſtir up your minds, and my own, by way of remembrance, that as ſubjects of the moſt gracious prince, who have received ſo many marks of the royal favour, we may ſhow the higheſt zeal for his Majeſty's perſon and government; that as miniſters of Chriſt, and ſervants of the moſt high God, whom he hath honoured to preach the goſpel of his Son, we may count nothing too dear, not even life itſelf, for the ſupport and advancement of his kingdom ‖. Unworthy ſhall we be of this glorious character, unfaithful to our truſt, ungrateful to the beſt of friends, and altogether unlike our great Lord and Maſter, if we do not prefer the good of ſouls, and the intereſt of religion, to our own private concerns.

* Luke, xvi. 11. † 1 Pet. ii. 14.
‡ Eſther, x. 3. ‖ Acts, xx. 24.

We learn both from the Old and New Teſtament, "That the converſion of ſinners, the "perfecting of the ſaints, and the edifying of "the body of Chriſt, is the great end and de-"ſign of our inſtitution: That God hath ſet "us as watchmen on the walls of our Jeruſa-"lem, to watch over all her intereſts, and to "guard her againſt all attacks: That we are "appointed ſtewards in God's houſe, to diſtri-"bute the abundant proviſion he hath prepa-"red for his people: And that the time faſt "approaches, when we muſt render an ac-"count of our ſtewardſhip *."

And doth it not highly concern us to have theſe important, intereſting truths, deeply impreſſed on our own minds; that, in view of that all-revealing day, we may be animated "to take "heed to ourſelves, and to all the flock over "which the Holy Ghoſt hath made us over-"ſeers; to feed the church of God, which he "hath purchaſed with his own blood †;" guarding all the avenues which lead unto it, againſt thoſe who would make merchandiſe of ſouls; caſting out every thing that offends againſt the laws of Chriſt; and bearing with his real ſervants who differ from us in leſſer matters; ſo preaching, and living, and acting, as we ſhall wiſh to have done in our departing moments, when the eternal world is opening upon us; "that when the chief Shepherd

* Acts, xxvi. 18. Eph. iv. 12. Iſ. lxii. 6. 1 Cor. iv. 1. 1 Pet. iv. 10. Heb. xiii. 17. † Acts, xx. 28.

"ſhall

"ſhall appear, we may receive a crown of "glory that fadeth not away *?"

Animated with this glorious proſpect, and fired with the nobleſt zeal for God, and the happineſs of mankind, let us prefer Jeruſalem above our chief joy, adopting the pious reſolution of Iſaiah, "For Zion's ſake will I not "hold my peace, and for Jeruſalem's ſake I "will not reſt, until the righteouſneſs thereof "go forth as brightneſs, and the ſalvation "thereof as a lamp that burneth †."

Time forbids a particular addreſs to the other characters and claſſes into which this audience might be divided: it muſt ſuffice to ſay, that the private Chriſtian, as well as his rulers and teachers, has got ſomething to do for God and his church, for his king and his country. "It is not in our power, (ſays one), to chuſe "the ſphere in which we firſt appear in the "world. It may not be in our power fairly "and honeſtly to riſe much above the ſphere "in which we firſt appeared. If any can do "ſo, they ſhould proportionably ſhine accord"ing to their elevation. But goodneſs and uſe"fulneſs in the world muſt be every Chri"ſtian's care. Whether high or low, ſomething "may be done for God and man: the rich "have many ways wherewith to benefit their "fellow-creatures: the poor may be rich in "grace; may inſtruct, adviſe, and direct thoſe "about them; may glorify God by their faith, "humility, and patience; and may do good to

* 1 Pet. v. 4. † Iſ. lxii. 1.

"men

"men by their example, and by prayer, the "inſtituted mean of obtaining bleſſings for "themſelves and others*:" i. e. In one word, every one may advance the common intereſt, by diſcountenancing vice, "the ruin and re-"proach of any people; and by promoting "that work of righteouſneſs, which exalteth a "nation, the effect whereof ſhall be quietneſs "and aſſurance for ever †."

Hearken then, men, brethren, and fathers, to what the Lord our God requires; that all of us, in imitation of our Pſalmiſt's generous concern for the church and nation of the Jews, may ſeek the good and peace of our Jeruſalem, with the greateſt ſincerity and ardour, eſpecially with reſpect to its religious intereſts.

For this purpoſe, it is highly neceſſary, that we ſhould acquaint ourſelves with our Bibles, which, as you have heard, contain ſuch exalted ſentiments of the moſt generous diſintereſted goodneſs; which not only recommend the warmeſt zeal for the temporal and eternal intereſts of men, by the moſt amiable precepts and animating examples; but clearly point out, how every one, in particular, may act his part in promoting the general happineſs and felicity.

And it is beyond queſtion neceſſary, to know the truth as it is in Jeſus, in the love thereof; to have an experimental knowledge of divine things; to have our hearts warmed with the

* Religion of Jeſus delineated.

† Prov. xiv. 34. Iſ. xxxii. 17.

love

love of God and of goodneſs *. Till religion be rooted in the heart, it cannot poſſibly influence the life and practice †. That man who has not the kingdom of God within him, can have no real concern for its proſperity in the world without him.

It is equally neceſſary, to keep upon our minds a lively ſenſe of the value and excellency of the ſeveral parts of our holy religion; careful never to depart from the foundation; nor to looſe one ſtone of the building, perſuaded that ſuch is the inſeparable connection between divine truths, that if the firſt link of the chain is wreſted out of our hands, the ſecond and third will follow of courſe.

But while we eſteem every truth precious, let us ſee to it, that our zeal be according to knowledge, proportioned to the value and importance of things, and conducted with that wiſdom and prudence, that meekneſs and condeſcenſion, which ſo well become the miniſters of the goſpel of peace, and the followers of the Lamb; who are taught, "that the wrath of "man worketh not the righteouſneſs of God ‡."

And as it is ſelf-evident, that the true intereſt and real honour of a Chriſtian church, can only be promoted by a ſteady regard to the laws and inſtitutions of Chriſt, the alone king and head of it, we would do well to take care, that the doctrines for which we contend, be the faith which was once delivered to the ſaints ‖, and not the doctrines and command-

* Eph. iv. 21. 2 Theſſ. ii. 10. 1 John, iii. 17.
† Matth. xii. 33.—35. ‡ James, i. 20. ‖ Jude, 3.

ments

ments of men; leſt when we would appear for God, we be found to fight againſt him, and overthrow that very church which we mean to eſtabliſh *."

Again, in our appearances for the public intereſt, every one ought to keep within his own ſphere, that ſphere in which divine Providence has placed him. As in the natural body, ſo in the body politic or eccleſiaſtic, the ſeveral members have their reſpective places and offices aſſigned them, and cannot intrude upon one another, without breaking the harmony and endangering the ſafety of the whole. Hence Paul ſuffers us not to roam at large, but exhorts "every man to abide in the ſame calling "wherein he is called †;" and to act for God, by performing the duties proper to his own ſtation, according to the talents beſtowed upon him ‡."

It ſhould likewiſe be obſerved, that having but "one Lord, one faith, one baptiſm, one "God, and Father of all," we are under the ſtrongeſt obligations "to ſtand faſt in one ſpi-"rit, with one mind, ſtriving together for the "faith of the goſpel; endeavouring to keep the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ‖:" remembering, on the one hand, the words of our Saviour himſelf, "that a houſe (or a king-"dom) divided againſt itſelf, cannot ſtand **;" and, on the other, that union in the ways of truth and righteouſneſs ſhall become both our

* Matth. xv. 6.—9. Col. ii. 18.—22. Acts, v. 39.
† 1 Cor. vii. 20. ‡ Rom. xii. 4.—8.
‖ Eph. iv. 3.—6. Philip. i. 27. ** Matth. xii. 25.

glory

glory and our ſtrength: then ſhall Jeruſalem, as a city compactly built together, withſtand all the attacks of her open or ſecret enemies, having ſalvation for walls and bulwarks.

Once more, if, according to our character and circumſtances, we would imitate the Pſalmiſt in the text, and that illuſtrious cloud of witneſſes, whoſe zeal for the Lord of hoſts is recorded by the inſpired writers with ſuch peculiar marks of the divine favour and approbation; if, like them, we would become bleſſings to ſociety, and ſupports to the church of God; we muſt carefully guard againſt "the "fear of man, which, as Solomon tells us, "bringeth a ſnare *." Animated by that divine faith, which "endures as ſeeing him who "is inviſible †, let us hold faſt our profeſſion "without wavering, let us quit ourſelves like "men, and be ſtrong ‡." Courage and reſolution will be found of the laſt importance, while we are employed in promoting the divine honour, and eſtabliſhing the kingdom of Chriſt in an ungrateful perſecuting world; where we may be called to ſuffer as well as to argue for our God, and muſt be ready, not only to be bound, but to die for the name of the Lord Jeſus. ‖.

On the whole, it is an obſervation of divine authority, verified by conſtant experience, "Except the Lord build the houſe, they la-"bour in vain that build it: except the Lord

* Prov. xxix. 25. † Heb. xi. 27.
‡ Heb. x. 23. 1 Cor. xvi. 13. ‖ Acts, xxi. 13.

"keep

"keep the city, the watchman watcheth but in "vain *." I beſeech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, and for the Lord Jeſus Chriſt's ſake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye ſtrive together in your prayers to God for us, that the ſervice which we have for Jeruſalem may be acceptable and profitable to the ſaints; that our gathering together, at this time, in a national aſſembly, may be with joy by the will of God; and that all our endeavours for the public good may be crowned with abundant ſucceſs.

"Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep "not ſilence; and give him no reſt, till he e-"ſtabliſh, and till he make Jeruſalem a praiſe "in the earth †;" lifting up your hearts with your hands unto God in the heavens, pleading in the prevailing name of the great Mediator for the promiſe of the Holy Ghoſt, "until the "Spirit be poured upon us from on high ‡;" who can ſpread his divine influence far enough to reclaim, not only a perverſe guilty nation ‖, but is able, as in a moment, to change this preſent ſcene of diſorder, of ſin and miſery, into a world of harmony, of righteouſneſs, and peace.

Then ſhall true religion appear in its genuine glory and beauty among us, and "the "kingdoms of this world become the king-"doms of our God, and of his Chriſt **;" or, as it is elegantly expreſſed by Iſaiah in all

* Pſal. cxxvii. 1. † Iſ. lxii. 6. 7. ‡ Ibid. xxxii. 15.
‖ Ibid. lxvi. 8.—13. ** Rev. xi. 15.

the beauty of the prophetic language, "The "wilderneſs and the ſolitary place ſhall be glad; "and the deſert ſhall rejoice and bloſſom as "the roſe: it ſhall bloſſom abundantly, and "rejoice even with joy and ſinging: they ſhall "ſee the glory of the Lord, and the excellency "of our God *. For the Lord ſhall comfort "Zion: he will comfort all her waſte places, "and he will make her wilderneſs like Eden, "and her deſert like the garden of the Lord †."

And in that day it ſhall be ſaid to us, as to Judah of old, "Walk about Zion, and go "round about her, tell the towers thereof. "mark ye well her bulwarks, conſider her "palaces; that ye may tell it to the genera- "tions following: for this God is our God "for ever and ever; he will be our guide even "unto death ‡."

Now unto this almighty all-ſufficient God, who hath been our dwelling-place in all generations, a wall of fire round about us, and the glory in the midſt of us; unto him be glory in the church, by Chriſt Jeſus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

* Iſ. xxxv. 1. 2. † Iſ. li. 3.
‡ Pſal. xlviii. 12.—14.

The End of the SECOND VOLUME.